STANDING POSES

KEY POINTS:

1. **Engage the Leg Muscles (Tadasana Legs):**
   - Root the feet
   - Lift the arches
   - Engage the calves and thighs (Calves forward/ Thighs Back)
   - Knees always point in same direction as toes
   - Front knee does not extend past the front heel (In all poses where the front knee is bent), but does stay in line with foot center

2. **Protect the Spine (Tadasana Torso):**
   - Elongate through the spine, extend the tailbone away from the crown
   - Lengthen/Descend the tail bone toward the floor, lift top chest
   - Lift the low belly (pubis to navel), navel to heart, heart to head
   - Absorb lower ribs into the body
   - From the pit of the abdomen, rise up through the spine
   - Counter-rotate the arms
   - Hug the shoulder blades down the back

3. **Lengthen through the Back of the Neck (Tadasana Head & Neck):**
   - Ears in line with shoulders
   - Crown revolves around the centerline
   - Soften the face and the gaze
   - Soften the throat, lay the tongue wide and flat on the floor of the mouth
Tadasana (Mountain Pose)

(Tah-DAHS-anna)

Tada= Mountain, Asana= Pose

**Type of Pose:** Standing Pose

Tadasana helps us to cultivate the balance of effort and surrender within a posture, the essence of yoga. It is our foundational, or “root” posture. It is important to learn the principles of Tadasana, as they are transferred into all other postures. Tadasana is used before and in between standing poses and also by itself to help improve posture and inner awareness.

**Benefits:**
- Improves posture
- Strengthens thighs, knees, and ankles
- Firms abdomen and buttocks
- Relieves Sciatica
- Relieves flat feet (by lifting inner arches)

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
- Headache
- Insomnia
- Low blood pressure

**Step by Step:**
1. Stand with your feet hip-bone distance a-part, 2nd toes pointing forward. (Option to stand with the bases of the big toes touching and small space between the heels). Rock back and forth, and from side to side, until you feel balanced evenly between the feet. Lift the toes, spread them wide and place them back down on the mat (releasing from pinky toes to big toes). Bring your awareness to the mounds beneath the big toes, the mounds beneath the baby toes and then the center of each heel. Allow these points to absorb equally down into the earth. As these points root down, lightly lift the arches of the feet, and feel earth’s energy rising up the inner legs into the pelvis, and from the pelvis up the central column (Sushumna) and out through the crown of the head.

2. Bend the knees and engage the calf muscles. Bring a slight external rotation to the shins as you press the feet down into the earth and straighten the legs. Lift and firm the thigh muscles. Rotate them slightly inward and then back into space. Soften the buttocks muscles.

3. Lengthen the tailbone to the floor as you lightly lift the low belly (pubis to navel). Extend up through the spine and breathe into the heart. Externally rotate the upper arms (widening across the chest) and feel the shoulder blades firming into the back. (If the lower ribs have blown
forward, pull the navel back in toward the spine to help even out and lengthen the torso). Hang the arms heavy down by your sides, and then turn just the palms to face each other. Extend energy out through the fingertips. Breathe into the back of the heart, searching for space.

4. Settle the ears back in line with the shoulders, and take the chin parallel to the floor. Without losing the extension and support of your spine, soften the belly and breathe.

5. Feel the balance of effort and surrender. Maintain enough muscular effort to support the structure, and then soften around the edges. Soften the face & the gaze.

6 **Anatomical Actions/ Oppositional Forces:**

- Calf muscles firm to shin bones.
- Thighs press back (Quadriceps muscles firm to the thigh bones, thigh bones press back into the hamstring muscles.
- Tailbone moves forward toward the pubic symphysis (or lengthens to floor).
- Lumbar spine moves back (Navel to spine).
- Sternum (breast bone) lifts vertically (by scooping the bottom tip of the shoulder blades up toward the collar bones).
- Center of ears in line with the shoulders.

(Counter-rotation of the arms: External rotation of the upper arms, internal rotation of lower arms).

**Beginners:**

1. You can improve your balance in this pose by standing with your feet slightly apart, anywhere from 3 to 5 inches.

2. Working with internal and external rotations can be quite overwhelming and confusing for beginners and advanced practitioners alike. Seek advice from an experienced teacher if you feel unsure of the rotations, or simply focus on engaging the calf and thigh muscles in Tadasana, without working with rotations. If you are working with rotations, be sure that the arches are lifted and the leg muscles are engaged before you create the internal rotation of the thighs. The knee caps must continue to face forward. If too much internal rotation occurs the knees start to turn inward and the arches collapse. Counter the internal rotation of the thighs with the external rotation of the shins.

**Modifications:** For tailbone, back injury or weakness – feet should be kept hip-width apart. For knee injury - knees and quads can be left more relaxed.

**Deepen the Pose:**

You can challenge your balance by practicing this pose with your eyes closed.

**Variations:**

1. You can alter the position of your arms in a variety of ways; for example: stretch the arms upward, perpendicular to the floor and parallel with each other, with the palms facing inward (see **Urdhva Hastasana**); or, interlace the fingers, roll the arms away from the chest, stretching them upward and perpendicular to the floor, so the palms face the ceiling.
(Parvatasana); or, cross the arms behind your back, holding each elbow with the opposite-side hand (be sure to reverse the cross of the forearms and repeat for an equal length of time).

2. Samasthiti: “Still and Tall Pose” is typically practiced at the beginning of sun salutation and is Tadasana with the hands placed in Anjali Mudra at the front of the heart.

Props:
You can check your alignment in this pose with your back against a wall. Stand with the backs of your heels, sacrum, and shoulder blades (but not the back of your head) touching the wall.

Partnering/Assists:
Stand beside your partner and check that the ear hole, the center of the shoulder joint, the center of the outer hip, and the center of the outer ankle bone all aligned, perpendicular to the floor.

Common Misalignments:

Ankles collapsing in or out: If the ankles are collapsing inward (toward the midline), shift more weight into the outer edges of the feet. In vice versa, if the ankles splay outward, shift more weight into the inner edges/mounds of the feet. In all cases, bring a light lift to the arches of the feet to help avoid ankles collapsing in or out.

Hyperextension in knees: Lift the arches to help activate the calf muscles. Firm the calves forward as you press thighs back to help avoid hyperextension in the knees. Or instruct for a slight micro-bend to the knees.

Hyperextension in lower back (Hyperlordosis/Swayback): Descend the tailbone toward the floor and lightly draw the lower belly in & up.

Lower front ribs protruding forward as you lift the sternum (breast bone): Pull the navel back into the spine/ or absorb the lower ribs back into the spine.

Hips protruding forward: Press the thighs back into space (even stick the buttocks out to exaggerate the action). Maintain this action of the thighs moving back as you press the tailbone forward to the pubis. Lift the top chest.

FAQ:
How can I get a feel for the shoulder blades hugging into the back?
Inhale, float the arms up at shoulder level (by lifting the armpit-chest), palms face down. Exhale and externally rotate the upper arms, widening across the chest, turning the palms to face upward (feel scapula moving into the back). Maintain this external rotation of the arms as you rotate just at the wrists, turning the palms to face downward. Inhale, breathe into the ribcage, lifting the chest. Maintain the lift to the chest as you exhale and release the arms down by your sides. Actively reach out through the fingertips.

or:
Scoop the tip of the scapula in toward the body and up toward the collarbones to support a lift to the top chest.

How do I lift the inner arches of the feet?
• Lift the inner ankles of each foot
• Root down through the tripod of the foot and lightly pulling the center of the foot upward.
• Use gravity’s rebounding action to assist
• Sometimes a lengthening of the arches is more required for a student, lengthening the space between the heel and the toe mounds.
• It’s helpful to focus on keeping the big toe mound rooted down into the floor as you lightly lift the inner arches.
• Feel a baby hummingbird egg beneath your arches. You want to lightly lift them so that the egg does not get crushed.

**Teachers:**
1. Keep the instructions simple and clear.

Remember, if you use anatomical terms (such as tailbone (coccyx), sternum, pubic symphysis, lumbar spine) when teaching, you must educate your students as to what these are and where they are located in the body. Tadasana is a great pose for educating your students on anatomy.

**Preparatory Poses:**
• Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)
• Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)

**Follow Up Poses:**
• All poses, especially standing poses
• Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Hands Pose)

**NOTES:**
Urdhva Hastasana
(Upward Hands Pose)

(oord-vah hahs-TAHS-anna)

urdhva = raised (or upward)
hasta = hand

**Type of Pose:** Standing Pose

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the belly
- Improves digestion
- Stretches the shoulders and armpits
- Helps relieve mild anxiety

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
Avoid the raised arms in this pose with shoulder or neck injuries.

**Step by Step:**
1. From Tadasana, externally rotate the arms so that the palms face forward, and the thumbs point behind you. With an inhalation, sweep the arms out to the sides and up toward the ceiling. Lift the shoulders right up by the ears.

2. Exhale, lightly wrap the outer edges of the armpits in toward the face (external rotation of the upper arms) and feel the shoulder blades widening across the back. Soften the space between the neck and shoulders.

3. Extend up through the armpits, turn the pinkies in slightly toward each other, and then lift through the pinky side of the hands (so that the thumbs point down toward the crown). Gaze forward or up at the thumbs.

4. There is a tendency for the lower ribs to protrude forward in this pose. To avoid this, lightly pull the navel in toward the spine, lengthen the tailbone toward the floor and extend straight up through the heart.

5. Stay in the pose for 3-5 breaths. Breathe into the back of the heart. Feel the ribcage lifting off the pelvis and the belly stretching. With an exhalation, release the arms back down to the torso.

**Beginners:** In Urdhva Hastasana, a counter-rotation of the arms occurs – a skill necessary to learn for arm balances and inversions. The upper arms externally rotate (shoulder blades spread wide) as the lower arms internally rotate (by turning the palms to face each other). This does not have to be a bold movement – so much that it causes tension – but with some focus and patience, this skill will be happily received and transferred into most of your poses.

There is also a tendency in this posture to put all of the focus into the arms and
shoulders, tensing up in these areas and forgetting about the lengthening of the pelvis. Learn to ease up on the tension in the upper extremities, so that you can feel the lower extremities lengthening.

**Modifications:** If you’re tighter in the shoulders, when you lift the arms up overhead, stop when your arms are approximately parallel to each other. But if possible, without hunching your shoulders forward, press your palms firmly together by touching the bases of your palms first, then the palms themselves, and finally the fingers.

**Variations:**

Parvatasana: interlace the fingers, roll the arms away from the chest, stretching them upward and perpendicular to the floor, so the palms face the ceiling. Lift the shoulders up by the ears and then externally rotate the upper arms (widen across the back). Energetically pull the wrists away from each other to feel the shoulder blades firm into the back.

**Assists:**

_Urdhva Hastasana Assist:_ Stand behind the student who has her arms raised above her head. Take the web between your thumb and in finger to her shoulders. Use your hands to assist in the external rotation of the upper arms and then to assist her in lifting the arms even higher and then pressing them in toward the ears. Ask her to maintain this action as you let go.

_Parvatasana Assist:_ Stand behind the student whose arms are raised above/hands clasped (but this time her palms face downward in the clasp). Straddle her back side so that your pelvis almost touches her back. Squat down and bring your head and neck through her arms and rest her hands at the base of your neck. Begin to straighten your legs and use the strength of your legs to lift her arms up toward the ceiling. Ask her to draw her shoulder blades down the back as you help her maintain the lift in the opposite direction.

**Misalignment:** It is a misalignment to lower your shoulders down away from the ears in this pose. The shoulders should remain lifted. Soften the space between the neck and shoulders—just enough to ease tension.

**NOTES:**
Utthita Trikonasana
(Extended Triangle Pose)

(oo-Tee-tah trik-cone-AHS-anna)
Utthita= Extended, Trikona=triangle
Tri= 3, Kona=angle

**Type of Pose:** Standing Pose, Open Hip

**Benefits:**
- Elongates & opens the spine & side waste
- Opens the hips, groins, hamstrings, calves, knees, ankles, shoulders & chest
- Strengthens & opens the thighs, knees & ankles
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Relieves backache, especially through second trimester of pregnancy
- Therapeutic for anxiety, stress, flat feet, infertility, neck pain, osteoporosis, and sciatica

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Low blood pressure
- Heart Condition: Practice against a wall. Keep the top arm on the hip.
- High blood pressure: Turn the head to gaze downward in the final pose.
- Neck problems: Don’t turn your head to look upward; continue looking straight ahead and keep both sides of the neck evenly long.

**Step by Step:**
1. Step the feet out 4 - 4 ½ feet. Turn the left toes slightly in toward the body (about 60 degrees). Turn right heel in, toes out to 90 degrees. Align the front heel to the arch of the back foot.

2. Externally rotate the front thigh so that the knee aligns with center of foot. (Allow for the pelvis to turn forward slightly and back foot to turn in slightly to accommodate this action).

3. Lift the toes, spread them wide and place them back on the floor. (Feel inner arches lifting). Draw energy up the inner legs to the pelvis. Lightly hug the leg muscles to the bones.

4. Inhale, stretch the arms out finger tip to finger tip (at shoulder level) and root down through back heel (big toe mound and outer heel).

5. Exhale, hinge at the hip joint (drawing right hip up into pelvis) & extend the torso over the front leg. Extend as far as you can without collapsing the bottom side of the torso. Then take the right hand to the outer thigh, shin, floor or block.
6. Open the chest & extend the top arm out at the level of the collarbone, palm facing forward. Gaze forward or revolve the skull around the center line to look up at the extended hand.

7. Hug the front calf muscle to the shin bone, to prevent the knee from collapsing. Lightly draw the lower belly in & up & lengthen from tail to crown.

8. Stay in Trikonasana for 3-5 breaths. Root down through the soles of the feet. Inhale, reach up through the extended arm and come back to neutral torso.

**Oppositional Forces:**
- Getting in to the pose: Right arm reaches forward as left hip extends back (to tip the pelvic bowl).
- Tail & Crown lengthen away from each other.
- In Pose: arms extend away from each other. Right sit bone squeezes forward as left thigh presses back.

**Anatomical Actions:**
- Center of foot aligns w/center of knee, center of knee aligns with center of thigh
- Engage Tadasana legs – lightly hug the muscles to the bones
- Front leg externally rotates, back leg - very slight internal rotation of skin, thigh bone presses back & out (wishbone effect)
- Resist calf muscles to shin bones
- Revolve skull around center line
- Head of shoulder bone aligns w/ the collarbone
- Counter-rotate the arms

**Beginner’s Tip:** The intention of this pose is not to reach the floor with the bottom hand, rather it is to keep both sides of the waistline long. You should only practice with the fingertips on the floor if you can maintain length on the underside of the torso.

**Modification:** Take a very slight hinge at the hip over the front leg. Work to find length on both side bodies in a variation that looks similar to a standing lateral bend, but with the feet spread apart 4 - 4 ½ feet. The bottom arm should rest easily on the front thigh.

**Deepen The Pose:**
Create a bind by wrapping the top arm around the back & connecting the back of the hand to the front hip crease – deepening the twist & the opening of the chest & shoulder.

**Variations:** Instead of stretching the top arm toward the ceiling, stretch it over the back of the top ear, parallel to the floor.

**Props:**
• Use a block underneath the fingertips to help you maintain length on the underside of the torso.
• Brace your back heel or the back of your torso against a wall if you feel unsteady in the pose.

**Partnering/Assists:**

1. **To find length to the bottom torso:**
   Have your partner stand in front of your forward foot, facing you. Inhale the forward arm up, parallel to the floor. Your partner can grasp your wrist and wedge his/her big toe into the forward hip crease. As you exhale, have your partner pull on your arm and push into your hip crease, stretching the underside of your torso. Partner places hand under armpit and assists in lowering bottom arm.

2. **To find length to the bottom torso:**
   Same as the first assist, except this time wedge the side of your hand (the web between you thumb and index finger) into the student’s hip crease.

3. **Opening the hips:** (Student performs Trikonasana to the left). Stand behind the student with your right hip braced against her left sit bone. Take your right hand to her right hip bone and gently pull that hand toward your body, assisting her in opening the hips. Essentially, you are helping her to press the left sit bone forward (by the brace of your hip) and press the right thigh back (by the assist of your hand on her hip).

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Standing poses
- Seated forward bends, or twists

**NOTES:**
Anjaneyasana (High Lunge)

**Type of Pose:** Standing

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the groins
- Strengthens the legs and arms

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
- Any serious knee injuries
- Neck problems - look down at the floor instead of straight ahead

**Step by Step:**
1. From Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend), bend the knees, plant the hands and step the right foot way back toward the back edge of your mat. Step back far enough so that your left knee aligns directly above the left heel.

2. Lay your torso on your front thigh and lengthen the heart forward. To soften your left groin, imagine that the thigh is sinking toward the floor under your torso’s weight. Simultaneously, firm the right thigh and push it up toward the ceiling, holding the right knee straight. Stretch your right heel toward the floor (but don’t actually root the heel, keep it lifted and radiating outward). Gaze straight ahead.

3. Either lift the hips and step the left foot back into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog), or lift the hips and step the right foot forward between your hands, and fold back down into Uttanasana.

**The Four Movements of High Lunge:**
refers to the distribution of prana from the pelvis to the legs in four energetic directions.

- Inhale, lift pubis to navel as you coil the spine (round the back like Cat Pose)

On the exhale:

1. From the center, draw the front knee over the ankle while resisting the front shin back simultaneously (vyana vayu)

2. From the center, press back through the core of the leg to radiate from the back heel (vyana vayu)

3. From the center, drop the hip (sit bone) of the front leg (apana vayu)

4. As the front hip drops, lift the underneath of the back leg upward (prana vayu)
CRESCENT POSE:

While in lunge (right foot back): Compact the hips (squeeze them together) and float the torso and arms up overhead. Lift the pelvis off the front thigh, aligning it vertically, between earth and sky. Sink down through the left sit bone as you lift the back of the right thigh. Stretch your right heel toward the floor (but don’t actually root the heel, keep it lifted and radiating outward). Gaze straight ahead or up at your raised hands.

NOTES:

Variations:

KNEELING LUNGE (Pelvis Lifted)

KNEELING LUNGE (Pelvis Sinking)

Back Bend Variation of KNEELING LUNGE (Pelvis Sinking)
**Virabhadrasana I**  
*(Warrior I Pose)*

(veer-ah-bah-drahs-anna)

*Virabhadra* = the name of a fierce warrior, an incarnation of Shiva, described as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet, wielding a thousand clubs, and wearing a tiger’s skin

**Type of Pose:** Standing Pose, Closed Hip

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the chest and lungs, shoulders and neck, belly, groins (psoas)
- Strengthens the shoulders and arms, and the muscles of the back
- Strengthens and stretches the thighs, calves and ankles

**Contraindications:**
- High blood pressure
- Heart problems
- Students with shoulder problems should keep their raised arms parallel (or slightly wider than parallel) to each other.
- Students with neck problems should gaze forward (keeping their head in a neutral position (Not looking up at ceiling or taking head back).

**Step by Step:**
1. Stand in Tadasana, with the feet hip-width apart. Place the hands on the hips. Bend the knees and step the right foot back about 4 feet, landing on separate tracks (heels hip-distance apart). Root the back heel to the floor and turn the toes out to about 20 degrees (so that they point approximately to the upper right corner of the mat). If the back heel doesn’t reach the floor, bring the back foot forward a bit until the heel can comfortably root. Point the front toes straight ahead.

2. Straighten the legs. Draw the left hip back and the right hip forward to square the hips (scissor the hips). If you feel a torque in the back knee, turn the back toes in even more toward the body, or adjust the length between the legs. (Remember - both knees always point in the same direction of the toes). Squeeze the right buttock forward as you press the right thigh back into space, anchoring the back heel. Externally rotate the arms so that the palms face forward (thumbs point back) and then release them down by your sides.

3. Inhale, raise the arms up overhead. Keep reaching up through the finger tips as you exhale and bend the right knee forward. Gaze down at the front knee. See that it does not extend past the front ankle, and that it does align with the
center of the foot (2nd toe).
4. Descend the tailbone to the earth as you lift the low belly (pubis to navel).
Raise the heart to the sky. Feel the entire rib cage lifting and expanding as you breathe.

5. Gaze forward. And if you haven’t any neck of upper back injuries: slowly take the head back from the root of the neck, which is the space between the shoulder blades. Search for length as you take the head back and gaze up at the ceiling. Stay in for 3-5 breaths. To come out: Inhale, lift through the fingertips and straighten the legs and torso. Exhale, release the hands back to the hips. Bend the knees & step forward into Tadasana.

**Oppositional Actions:**
- Feet root as arms and torso rise
- Back buttock squeezes forward as the same thigh presses back
- Tailbone descends as inner heart rises
- Weight shifts into back leg (& heel), as front knee bends forward
- Front sit bone descends as back thigh lifts
- Weight moves in opposite directions: into mounds of front foot & back heel
- Arms lift as shoulder blades draw down
- Upper arms externally rotate as lower arms internally rotate (counter-rotation)

**Beginner’s Tips:** Be sure you are not jamming the low back (lengthen tail, lift low belly) or crunching at the space behind the heart (absorb lower ribs in to spine). Try to keep a nice long spine with the sternum and tailbone lengthening away from each other.

**Modifications:** Step the left foot out hip width apart to allow more room for the hips to square. Also, practice with a shorter stance between the legs.

**Deepen the Pose:**
- Lift the shoulders right up by the ears. Counter rotate the arms (Like Urdhva Hastasana): Wrap the outer edges of the armpits in toward the face (external rotate upper arms) and reach up through the little finger sides of the hands. Then firm the upper arms in toward the face.
- Use a wider foot stance to allow the front thigh to come parallel to the ground. Make sure the right knee stays directly above the right heel. Ground down the outer edge of the back foot while lifting the inner arch of that foot. Really engage the quadriceps. Hold the pose for ten breaths or 15-20 seconds.
- Use heel to heel, or heel to arch alignment so long as the hips can square and there in no torque in the back knee.

**Variations:** Vira I can be practiced with an upper back bend. Support the spine by scooping the tailbone toward the pubis and lifting the top chest (by scooping the bottom tip of the shoulder blades into the body and up toward the collarbones.
Don’t stick the chest out - creating a crunch in the thoracic spine, instead absorb the lower ribs and navel in toward the spine.

**Misalignments:** Front knee extends past heel, or collapses in or out (not in line with toes); Back foot crosses behind the forward foot. Back knee collapsed; Lower
back jam; Lower ribs sticking out; Compressed neck.

Preparatory Poses:
- Lunge, or Crescent Pose
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose)
- All Open-Hip Standing poses
- Baddah Konasana (Bound-Angle Pose)

Follow Up Poses:
- Virabhadrasana III (Warrior III)
- All backbends

NOTES:
Virabhadrasana II
(Warrior 2 Pose)

(veer-ah-bah-drahs-anna)

Virabhadra = the name of a fierce warrior, an incarnation of Shiva, described as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet, wielding a thousand clubs, and wearing a tiger’s skin

Type of Pose: Standing, Open Hip

Benefits:
- Strengthens and stretches the legs and ankles
- Stretches the groins, chest and lungs, shoulders
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Increases stamina
- Relieves backaches, especially through second trimester of pregnancy
- Therapeutic for carpal tunnel syndrome, flat feet, infertility, osteoporosis, and sciatica

Contraindications and Cautions:
- Diarrhea
- High blood pressure
- Neck problems: Don’t turn your head to look over the front hand; continue to look straight ahead with both sides of the neck lengthened evenly.

Step by Step:
1. From Tadasana, with hands on the hips. Step the feet out 4 – 4 ½ feet. Turn the left toes slightly in toward the body (about 60 degrees). Turn right heel in, toes out to 90 degrees. Align front heel to back arch.

2. Externally rotate front thigh so that the knee aligns with center of foot (allow for pelvis to turn forward and back foot to turn in slightly to accommodate this action). As the pelvis turns slightly forward, lift and lengthen through the spine and then hug the left shoulder blade down the back (turning just the upper chest slightly to the side wall).

4. Inhale, stretch the arms out at shoulder level. Now, shift your weight into the back leg & heel. Maintain the weight moving back as you EXHALE and bend the front knee down into Virbhadrasana II. Turn the gaze to look out past your fingertips.

5. Be sure that the knee does not extend past the front heel and that it does stay in line with the center of the foot. Squeeze the right sit bone forward and press the left thigh bone back into space (to open the hips).

6. Lengthen tailbone to the floor, lift the chest and then breathe into the back of the heart. Externally rotate the upper arms and draw both shoulder blades down the back.
Maintain this external rotation of the upper arms as you rotate just at the wrists to face the palms downward.

7. Stay for 3-5 breaths. To come out, press down through the sole of the front foot and straighten the leg.

**Anatomical Actions:**
- Center of foot aligns w/center of knee, center of knee aligns with center of thigh
- Strong Tadasana legs – hug the muscles to the bones
- Front leg externally rotates, back leg slight internal rotation, back & out
- Counter-rotate the arms (eyes of elbows pointing up to ceiling).

**Beginner’s Tip:** When you bend the left knee, bend it very quickly with an expressive exhalation, and aim the inside of the left knee toward the little-toe side of the left foot.

** Modifications and Props:**
If you have difficulty supporting yourself in this pose, position a metal folding chair outside your left leg, with the front edge of the chair seat facing you. As you bend the left knee to come into the pose, slide the front edge of the seat under your left thigh (taller students may need to build up the height of the chair seat with a thickly folded blanket). Repeat with the right leg bent.

**Variations:**
#1: In the description above, the shoulders are centered over the pelvis with the sides of the torso equally long. You can also lean the torso slightly away from the left leg, tilting the arms parallel to the line of the top shoulders. This stretches the left side of the torso. Repeat on the right side.

#2: Turn the front palm face the ceiling and with an exhalation, extend that arm up to the sky into Reverse Warrior. Lightly rest the back arm down onto the leg (not the knee).

**Partnering/ Assists:**
#1: Strengthening the back leg. Have your partner stand behind your back leg. Loop a strap around your inner groin, and as you bend the front knee into the pose, your partner can pull firmly on the strap while you resist the back-leg inner groin away from that movement. Feel how this helps to open the groins.

#2: Opening the hips. (Student performing Vira II to the left): Stand behind the student with your right hip braced against her left sit bone. Take your right hand to her right hip bone and gently pull that hand toward your body, as you assisting her in opening the hips.
Essentially, you are helping her to press the left sit bone forward (by the brace of your hip) and her press the right thigh back (by the assist of your hand on her hip).

### #3: External rotation to the front thigh.
Stand in front of the student (performing Vira II to the left): Place your right hand on her top front thigh, your left hand on the bottom of the front thigh. Assist in an external rotation of the thigh, by helping the thigh roll out (away from you) with your hands.

**Teachers – look for knees extending past the front heel or collapsing in or out.** Assist accordingly.

**Deepen the Pose:**
Squeeze the front buttock forward, press the back thigh back into space and then bend the knee to come down even further.

Deepening the awareness of the back leg:
(for advanced practitioners): Press the thigh bone back into space and then press the inner thigh toward outer thigh (wishbone effect)

### Preparatory Poses:
- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)
- Baddah Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)
- Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)

### Follow-Up Poses:
- Bakasana (Crow Pose)
- Standing poses, seated forward bends, or twists

### NOTES:
Utthita Parsvakonasana
(Side-Angle Pose)

(oo-TEE-tah parsh-vah-cone-AHS-anna)
utthita = extended, parsva = side, flank
c trunk = angle

Type of Pose: Standing, Open Hip

Benefits:
• Strengthens and stretches the legs and ankles
• Stretches the groins, chest and lungs, shoulders
• Stimulates abdominal organs
• Increases stamina
• Relieves backaches, especially through second trimester of pregnancy
• Therapeutic for carpal tunnel syndrome, flat feet, infertility, osteoporosis, and sciatica

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Diarrhea
• High blood pressure
• Neck problems: Don’t turn your head to look over the front hand; continue to look straight ahead with both sides of the neck lengthened evenly.

Step by Step:
1. Step the feet out 4 – 4 ½ feet. Turn the left foot slightly in toward the body (about 60 degrees) Turn the right heel in, toes out to 90 degrees. Align the front heel to back arch.

2. Externally rotate the front thigh so that the knee aligns with center of foot (allow for pelvis to turn forward slightly and

3. Inhale, stretch the arms out fingertip to fingertip. Anchor your weight into the back leg & heel. Exhale, bend the front knee & lower down into Virbhadrasona II. (Be sure that the front knee does not extend past the heel and that it stays in line with the center of the foot).

4. On another exhalation, hinge at the hip, extending the bottom torso long, and take the forearm to the thigh (palm face up or down). For a deeper variation: lay the torso down onto the thigh and take the fingertips to floor or block on the outside of the foot. Resist the urge to crunch/collapse the lower side of the torso to get your hand to the floor. Instead, keep both sides of the waistline long.

5. Extend the top arm alongside the ear, palm facing down. Reach actively through the extended fingertips as you draw the shoulder blade down the back. Use the leverage of your knee against the bottom arm to help you roll the upper chest open. Gaze forward or up at the extended arm. Draw the chin slightly down toward the
chest to lengthen through the back of the neck.

6. Squeeze the right sit bone forward and press the left thigh bone back in to space to open the hips. Draw the lower belly in and up, and lengthen from tail to crown.

7. Stay for 3-5 breaths. Inhale, reach through the top arm and straighten the legs to come up.

**Anatomical Actions:**
- Center of foot aligns w/center of knee, center of knee aligns with center of thigh
- Strong Tadasana legs – hug the muscles to the bones
- Front leg externally rotates, back leg slight internal rotation, back & out
- Counter-rotate the arms (eyes of elbows pointing up to ceiling).
- Revolve the skull around the centerline

**Beginner’s Tip:**
When you bend the left knee, bend it very quickly with an expressive exhalation, and aim the inside of the left knee toward the little-toe side of the left foot.

**Modification:** In the modified version, the forearm rests on the thigh, rather than reaching for the floor with the hand.

---

**Modified Side Angle Pose**

**To Deepen the Pose:**
#1: Draw the top arm around the back side. Take the back of the hand to the hip to create a bind – assisting you in an opening of the chest and shoulder.

#2: For a deeper bind: Take the bottom hand underneath the leg and clasp the right hand. Open the chest and shoulder.

**Props:**
#1: If you have difficulty supporting yourself in this pose, position a metal folding chair outside your left leg, with the front edge of the chair seat facing you. As you bend the left knee to come into the pose, slide the front edge of the seat under your left thigh (taller students may need to build up the height of the seat with a thickly folded blanket). Repeat with the right leg bent.

#2: Take the fingertips to a block on the outside of the foot to assist you in finding length on bottom side waistline.
Partnering/Assists:

#1: Opening the hips. Student performing Side Angle to the left: Stand behind the student with your right hip braced against her left sit bone. Take your right hand to her right hip bone and gently pull that hand toward your body, as you assisting her in opening the hips. Essentially, you are helping her to press the left sit bone forward (by the brace of your hip) and her press the right thigh back (by the assist of your hand on her hip).

#2: External rotation to the front thigh. Stand in front of the student (performing Side Angle to the left): Place your right hand on her top front thigh, your left hand on the bottom of the front thigh. Assist in an external rotation of the thigh, by helping the thigh roll out (away from you) with your hands.

Preparatory Poses:
- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)
- Baddah Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)
- Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)

Follow-Up Poses
- Bakasana (Crow Pose)
- Standing poses, seated forward bends, or twists

NOTES:
BALANCE POSES

KEY POINTS:
1. Find a Focal Point ("Dristy")
2. Strong and rooted standing leg, press calf forward/thigh bone back (Tadasana Leg)
3. Lengthen from tail to crown
4. Tadasana torso/head/neck
5. Calm the Mind
Ardha Chandrasana  
(Half Moon Pose)

(are-dah chan-DRAHS-anna)  
ardha = half  
chandra = glittering, shining, having the brilliancy of light (said of the gods); usually translated as “moon”

**Type of Pose:** Balance

**Benefits:**
- Strengthens the abdomen, ankles, thighs, buttocks, and elongates the spine
- Stretches the groins, hamstrings and calves
- Opens the shoulders and chest
- Improves coordination & balance
- Helps relieve stress and anxiety
- Relieves backache (by toning the lumbar and sacral spine)
- Relieves Osteoporosis, Sciatica, Fatigue, Indigestion, Menstrual pain, Constipation
- Improves circulation in the feet

**Contraindications:**
- Headache/ migraine/ low blood pressure
- Diarrhea
- Insomnia
- Eye strain
- Varicose veins
- Chronic fatigue syndrome or tiredness
- Hypertension – do not look up at the raised arm – look straight ahead.
- For neck problems, don’t turn head to look upward; continue looking straight ahead and keep both sides of the neck evenly long.

**Step by Step:**

1. Start in Trikonasna (Triangle Pose) to the right, with the lower finger-tips extended on a block. Bring the left hand to your left hip. Maintain the gaze forward as you bend the front knee and drag the back foot in about 12 inches.

2. Pick up the block and bring it forward on the floor, placing the inner edge about 12 inches in front of the pinky-toe.

3. Maintain the gaze forward. Exhale, straighten the standing leg as you raise the back leg to hip level (or a little above hip level). Inhale, lengthen the heart forward as you open and stack the hips one on top of the other. (Avoid locking the standing leg knee back in hyperextension.

4. Firm the right scapula (shoulder blade) to the back, opening the chest to the side wall. For more of a challenge, extend the top arm up to the ceiling and from the right temple, turn the gaze to look up at the extended hand.
5. Lift the arch of the standing foot, and draw energy from the ground, up the leg and into the groin. Extend energy out from your core in all directions. Lengthen from crown to tail, from tail to back heel, from the heart out through both hands.

6. Stay in the pose for 3-5 breaths. Exhale, lower the extended leg down to the floor and come back up through Trikonasana, bringing the block along for the ride and repeat on opposite side.

**Modifications:** To help find balance, as well as length in the pose, all students should practice the pose with the hand on a block. Start with the block at its highest height and, if your balance is steady and comfortable, lower it down first to its middle height, then finally if possible to its lowest height, or no block.

**Props:** Balance is always tricky in this pose for beginners. A wall is a useful prop, which you can use in one of two ways: Stand with your back to the wall, one leg’s length away from the wall. Exhale and bend forward into a standing forward bend, then inhale and raise your left leg parallel to the floor and press the left sole against the wall. Start with your toes turned toward the floor. Exhale again and rotate your torso to the left; at the same time, turn the left leg and foot until the inner foot is parallel to the floor. Rest your left hand on the left hip. The pressure of the raised heel against the wall will help you maintain your balance. You can also perform the pose with your backside leaning against a wall.

**Deepen the Pose**
To increase the challenge of this pose, raise the lower hand away from the floor and rest it on the standing thigh. To go further, bring the lower hand to the heart to the position of anjali mudra. Secondly, lower the raised hand to join in anjali mudra. Balance solely on the standing leg for 15 to 30 seconds.

**Assists/Partnering:** Play the role of a “living wall” for your student. Either stand with your hip braced to hers (acting as the wall on her backside) or stand at her extended foot and have her press her heel into your hand (as if it were the wall). Make adjustments to help the chest and hips open and square off perpendicular to the floor. Make sure the leg is lifting so that there is a strong line reaching from the torso through the leg to the ball of the foot.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Baddha Konasana
- Supta Padangusthasana
- Utthita Parsvakonasana
- Utthita Trikonasana
- Virasana
- Vrksasana

**Follow Up Poses:**
Ardha Chandrasana is usually sequenced somewhere in the middle of a standing pose series, usually after Trikonasana (Triangle), but you might try:
- Parivrtta Trikonasana
- Parsvottanasana
- Prasarita Padottanasana

**NOTES:**
Garudasana (Eagle Pose)

For Garudasana you need strength, flexibility, and endurance, but also unwavering concentration that actually calms the fluctuations (vr̥tti) of consciousness. This is true of all the yoga poses, but it's a bit more obvious in pretzel-like Eagle.

(Gah-rue-DAHS-anna)

Garuda = the mythic "king of the birds," the vehicle of Vishnu. The word is usually rendered into English as "eagle," though according to one dictionary the name literally means "devourer," because Garuda was originally identified with the "all-consuming fire of the sun's rays."

Type of Pose: Balance

Benefits:
- Strengthens and stretches the ankles and calves
- Stretches the thighs, hips, shoulders, and upper back
- Improves concentration
- Improves sense of balance

Contraindications and Cautions:
Students with knee injuries should avoid this pose, or perform only the leg position described in the Beginner’s Tip below.

Step by Step:
1. Stand in Tadasana. Bend your knees slightly, lift your left foot up and, balancing on your right foot, cross your left thigh over the right. Point your left toes toward the floor, press the foot back, and then hook the top of the foot behind the lower right calf. Balance on the right foot.

2. Stretch your arms straight forward, parallel to the floor, and spread your scapulas wide across the back of your torso. Cross the arms in front of your torso so that the right arm is above the left, then bend your elbows. Snug the right elbow into the crook of the left, and raise the forearms perpendicular to the floor. The backs of your hands should be facing each other.

3. Move the right hand to the right and the left hand to the left, so that the palms are now facing each other. The thumb of the right hand should pass in front of the little finger of the left. Now press the
palms together (as much as is possible for you), lift your elbows up, and stretch the fingers toward the ceiling.

4. Stay for 15 to 30 seconds, then unwind the legs and arms and stand in Tadasana again. Repeat for the same length of time with the arms and legs reversed.

**Beginner’s Tip:** Beginners often find it difficult to wrap the arms around until the palms touch. Stretch your arms straight forward, parallel to the floor, while holding onto the ends of a strap. Follow the rest of the instructions stated in step 2 above and keep the strap taut between your hands.

Beginners also find it difficult to hook the raised-leg foot behind the standing-leg calf, and then balance on the standing foot. As a short-term option cross the legs but, instead of hooking the raised foot and calf, press the big toe of the raised-leg foot against the floor to help maintain your balance.

**Deepen the Pose:** Look at the tips of your thumbs once you’re in the full pose. Typically the thumb tips point a little bit off to the side of the upper arm. Press the mound of the upper thumb into the bottom hand and turn the thumb tips so they point directly at the tip of your nose.

**Variations:** A challenging variation of Garudasana: From the pose as described above, exhale and lean your torso into a forward bend, pressing the forearms against the top-leg thigh. Hold for a few breaths, then come up with an inhalation. Repeat on the second side.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose)
- Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide Leg Forward Bend)
- Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero)
- Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle)
- Upavistha Konasana (Seated Wide Leg Forward Bend)
- Virasana (Hero’s Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

**Follow-up Poses:**
Garudasana is usually sequenced near the end of the standing pose series. The arm position in the pose is particularly useful in teaching how to widen the back torso in inverted poses like Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand) and Sirsasana (Headstand). Other follow-up poses might include:
- Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose)
- Utkatasana (Chair Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

**NOTES:**
Virabhadrasana III
(Warrior III Pose)

(veer-ah-bah-DRAHS-anna)

Virabhadra = the name of a fierce warrior, an incarnation of Shiva, described as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet; wielding a thousand clubs; and wearing a tiger’s skin.

**Type of Pose:** Balance

**Benefits:**
- Strengthens the ankles and legs
- Strengthens the shoulders and muscles of the back
- Tones the abdomen
- Improves balance and posture

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
- High blood pressure

**Step by Step:**
1. From Warrior I, bring the hands to the hips and lay the torso down on the front thigh. Shift the weight forward into the front foot (back heel will lift to do so, but keep toes connected to floor in this step).

2. Either maintain hands on hips or stretch the arms forward, parallel to the floor and parallel to each other, palms facing each other. Draw the lower belly in and up.

3. Now, straighten the standing leg AS you lift the back leg up off the floor. Extend the heart and arms forward as you reach back through the extended leg.

4. The arms, torso, and raised leg should all be positioned relatively parallel to the floor. For many students the pelvis tends to tilt. Release the hip [of the raised leg] toward the floor until the two hip points are even and parallel to the floor.

5. Stay in this position for 30 seconds to a minute. Bend the standing knee deeply and release the back foot to the floor (rooting the heel). Come back up through Warrior 1.

**Beginner’s Tip:**

Normally students come up into Virabhadrasana III by lunging the torso forward. This tends to shift the body weight onto the ball of the front foot and unbalance the position. Don’t allow the torso to swing forward as you move into position; instead, as you straighten the front knee, think of pressing the head of the thighbone back. This centers the femur in the hip joint, grounds the heel into the floor, and stabilizes the position.
When you straighten the front knee by pushing the head of the thighbone back, imagine that the same-leg calf is resisting forward against the shin. These two opposing movements prevent the knee from locking or hyperextending and further stabilize the position.

**Variations:**
In Virabhadrasana III you can vary the position of your arms. Try stretching the arms out to the sides, like the wings of an airplane, reaching them back, palms facing up, along the sides of your torso, or place the hands on the floor for a modified variation.

**Modifications:**
- Maintain hands on floor (or two blocks) or at the hips.
- Micro-bend standing leg knee

**Props:**
Use 2 blocks underneath your hands, or your hands against a wall for balance.

**Partnering:**
A partner can act as a support for your pose. Have him stand in front of you. When you reach your arms forward just before lifting into the full pose, he should grasp your wrists in his hands. He should guide you into position, not pull, and then support your wrists as lightly as possible.

A partner can also assist you in observing the hips. Have her observe and then tell you if your pelvis is tilted and whether you need to lower or lift a hip to level them.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose)
- Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide Legged Forward Bend)
- Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)
- Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)
- Utkatasana (Fierce Pose)
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
- Virabhadrasana II (Warrior 2 Pose)
- Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1 Pose)
- Virasana (Hero Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

**Follow-Up Poses:**
Virabhadrasana III is usually performed as part of the standing pose sequence. Other possibilities include:
- Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (Pigeon Pose)
- Halasana (Plow Pose)
- Hanumanasana (Leg Split)
- Natarjasana (Dancer Pose)
- Navasana (Boat Pose)
- Sirsasana (Headstand)
- Utkatasana (Chair/Fierce Pose)

**NOTES:**
Vrksasana  
(Tree Pose)  
(vrik-SHAS-anna)

Vrksa= tree

Type of Pose: Balance

Benefits:
• Strengthens thighs, calves, ankles, and spine
• Stretches the groins and inner thighs, chest and shoulders
• Improves sense of balance
• Relieves sciatica and reduces flat feet

Contraindications/Cautions:
• Headache
• Insomnia
• Low blood pressure
• High blood pressure: Don’t raise arms overhead

Step by Step:
1. From Tadasana, pour your weight into the right foot. Fix your gaze onto a “dristy” (a non-moving focal point).

2. Bend the left knee and draw the sole of the left foot to the inner right ankle. In the next stage, draw the foot to the calf muscle and in the third stage; draw the foot to the inner thigh of the standing leg, toes pointing toward the floor. (Be sure not to place the foot on the knee).

3. Engage the inner thigh muscle of the standing leg and then press the sole of the left foot into the thigh, creating a sealing effect. Make that connection between inner thigh and foot, creating equal resistance between the two.

4. Bring your hands to your hips and see that they are level and square to the front of the mat.

5. Lengthen the tailbone to the floor and lift the inner heart toward the ceiling. Find equal length on both sides of the waistline.

6. Bring your hands to Anjali Mudra. Root down through the standing foot as you raise the arms up overhead. Keep the palms sealed together or open the arms like branches on a tree.

7. Stay for 3-5 breaths. Exhale, draw the arms back down to the heart center. Use your hands to assist in drawing the knee back to center and release the leg to the floor in Tadasana.
Beginner’s Tips:

- **To open the hips**: Squeeze the left buttock forward and press the standing thigh back. Feel a lengthening from the inner left thigh all the way down to the knee. Then press the left foot into the inner right thigh.

- **Lengthen both side bodies long.**
  For the side with the bent knee: Draw a diagonal line from the knee to the earth and lengthen the knee down along this line as you extend the side body upward.

**Modifications**: Practice the first variation, with sole of foot to the inner ankle. When your balance improves, take the foot off the floor to the calf or inner thigh of the standing leg.

**Deepen the Pose**: As with Tadasana, you can challenge your balance by practicing this pose with your eyes closed, learning to balance without any reference to the outer environment.

**Variations**: Hands can stay at hips, extended to the floor, in Anjali Mudra (heart center), or up overhead with palms joined or arms separated.

**Props**: You can stand with your back braced against a wall if you feel unsteady.

**Assists/Partnering**: If you are practicing Vrksasana with the arms raised overhead, a partner can help you lift and lengthen your arms. First raise your arms perpendicular to the floor. Have your partner stand behind you and press inward against your outer upper arms, then lift your outer arms toward the ceiling. At the same time, draw your inner arms downward, from the wrists to the tops of the shoulders.

**Preparatory Poses**:
- Baddah Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)
- Virabhadrasana I (Warrior I Pose)

**Follow Up Poses**: Standing Poses and Seated or Floor Poses

**NOTES**: 

• Baddah Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
• Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)
• Virabhadrasana I (Warrior I Pose)
KEY POINTS:

1. Press tailbone to pubis, lift pubis to navel, lift navel to heart, heart to head

2. Lengthen from tail to crown

3. Hug the shoulder blades onto the back

4. Counter-rotate the arms
Plank Pose

Plank Pose is a good lead in to more challenging arm balances.

**Type of Pose:** Core Stabilizer

**Benefits:**
- Strengthens the arms, wrists, and spine
- Tones the abdomen

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
- Carpal tunnel syndrome

**Step by Step:**
1. Start in Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down-Dog Pose). Inhale, draw the torso forward until it aligns parallel to the floor. See that the wrists are directly underneath the shoulders, feet hip-distance apart and heels stacked over the toes.

2. Lengthen the tail bone toward the heels and lift the low belly toward the heart, engaging your core. Bring a slight external rotation to the upper arms so that the eyes of the elbows come forward, press your outer arms inward, and then seal the thumb and index fingers to the floor. Hug the shoulder blades onto the back and then spread them away from the spine. Lift the back of the heart and spread your collarbones away from the sternum.

3. Internally rotate the thighs and press them up toward the ceiling, as you resist your tailbone down toward the floor and lengthen it toward the heels. Extend the sternum forward as you press your heels back, so that you feel the body getting long and strong. Lift the base of the skull away from the back of the neck and look straight down at the floor, keeping the throat and eyes soft.

4. Plank Pose is one of the positions in the traditional Sun Salutation sequence. You can also perform this pose by itself and stay anywhere from 30 seconds to 1 minute.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
- To help strengthen the arms in this pose, loop and secure a strap around your upper arms, just above the elbows. Push the inner arms out against this strap. Release the outer arms from the shoulders to the floor, and lift the inner arms from the bases of the index fingers to the shoulders.
- Practice with the knees on the floor, lower belly lifted and engaged.

**Deepen The Pose:**
Open the space between the shoulder blades. As you press the outer arms inward, push the inner borders of the shoulder blades into this resistance. Make sure you don’t narrow across the collar bones to do this. This is a useful action to learn for poses like Bakasana (Crow) and Sirsasana (Headstand).
Variations:

- Just as Adho Mukha Svanasana has a one-leg-lifted variation, so does Plank Pose. After coming into the position, inhale and lift one leg parallel to the floor. Press strongly through the raised heel and lengthen through the crown of your head, keeping the tailbone pressed towards the pubis. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds, exhale the foot to the floor, then repeat with the left leg for the same length of time.

- Begin on all four’s (Table Top Pose). Soften the shoulders away from the ears. Widen the shoulder blades across the back as you simultaneously widen across the front of the chest. Spread the fingers wide and find a firm base of support through the hands, pressing down into the pads below the knuckles and into the web between the thumbs and index fingers. Rotate the upper arms slightly so that the eyes of the elbows come forward. Stretch the left leg out, curl the toes under. Stretch the right leg out, curl the toes under. Lengthen the tailbone toward the heels. Lift the low belly (pubis to navel). Keep the head in line with spine and gaze straight down at the floor. Press back through the heels as you reach the crown of the head forward.

Modified Plank

Partnering:
A partner can help you learn about the lift of the top thighs in this pose. While in the position, have your partner loop a strap around the topmost thighs, just where they join the pelvis, and lift up. Press your tailbone down, against this lift, and lengthen along your back thighs through your heels.

Preparatory Poses:

- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog Pose)
- Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff Pose)

Follow-Up Poses:

- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog Pose)
- Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff Pose)
- Bakasana (Crane/Crow Pose)

NOTES:

Modifications and Props:
Release the knees down to the earth for a modified version.
Chaturanga Dandasana
(Four-Limbed Staff Pose)

(chaht-tour-ANG-ah don-DAHS-anna)

chaturanga = four limbs
(chatur = four, anga = limb)
danda = staff (refers to the spine, the central "staff" or support of the body)

type of pose: Core Stabilizer

Benefits:
• Strengthens the arms and wrists
• Develops core stability
• Prepares body for inversions and arm balances

contra indications/cautions:
• Carpal tunnel syndrome
• Pregnancy

step by step:
1. From Plank Pose: Exhale, bend the elbows straight back (hugging them into the body) and lower down half-way. (Resist drooping the shoulders toward the floor. Instead, keep the heads of the shoulders lifted at chest level all the way down). Internally rotate the fronts of the thighs, and then press them up toward the back thighs. Lengthen the tailbone toward the heels and lift the low belly (pubis to navel). Extend the heels back and heart forward.

2. Press the bases of the index fingers firmly to the floor as you widen the space between the collar bones. Maintain equal broadness to the shoulder blades, the elbows hugging close into the body and drawing back toward the heels. Lift the base of the skull away from the neck and gaze slightly forward on the floor.

3. Chaturanga Dandasana is one of the positions in the Sun Salutation sequence. You can also practice this pose individually for anywhere from 10 to 30 seconds. Release with an exhalation. Either lay your self lightly down onto the floor or push strongly back to Adho Mukha Svanasana, lifting through the top thighs and the tailbone.

Beginner Tips:
• Option to pass through Chaturanga Dandasana and lower all the way to the floor. When lowering all the way down to the floor, keep the torso long all the way down (belly will meet the floor just before the chest). This way the chest remains lifted and the head of the shoulders do not droop forward (causing undue strain to the sensitive shoulder joints).
• When the elbows splay out to the sides, the vulnerable shoulder joints do most of the work. When the elbows stay close in to the body, the triceps safely do most of the work.
• There is a tendency in this pose for the lower back to sway toward the floor and the tailbone to poke up toward the ceiling. Throughout your stay in this
position, keep the tailbone firmly in place, with the legs very active and slightly turned in, pressing through the heels. Draw the pubis toward the navel (Lift the low belly).

**Modifications:**

The completed form of Chaturanga Dandasana is quite difficult to perform at first, until your arms, back, and legs are strong enough to support you. From Plank Pose, begin by lowering your knees to the floor and then, with an exhalation, lower your sternum to within an inch or two above the floor.

**Deepen The Pose:**

Even experienced students have difficulty with Chaturanga Dandasana. Lay a thickly rolled blanket on the floor below your Plank Pose, parallel to your spine. Lower yourself lightly onto this support. Use it minimally, just enough to keep yourself afloat.

**Variations:**

If possible, slowly roll over the balls of your feet onto the tops of your feet and shift the torso slightly forward. This will bring the hands back beside your waist and increase the challenge of the position.

**Props:**

You can get a feel for this challenging position by practicing it standing upright. Stand and face a wall, a few inches away from the wall. Press your hands against the wall, slightly lower than the level of your shoulders. Imagine that you are trying to push yourself away from the wall, but the firmness of your shoulder blades against the back prevents any movement. Lengthen your tailbone toward your heels and lift the top of your sternum toward the ceiling.

**Partnering:**

A partner can help you learn to anchor the pelvis in this pose and lengthen the spine. Perform Chaturanga Dandasana (using a blanket support under your thighs if needed). Have your partner straddle your waist, pigeon-toe his/her feet, and squeeze the top rim of your pelvis with his/her lower legs. Your partner can drag your pelvis back slightly, toward the feet, while you lift the top of your sternum in the opposite direction.

**Preparatory Poses:**

- Plank Pose
- Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Up-Dog Pose)

**Follow-Up Poses:**

- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog Pose)
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Up-Dog Pose).

**NOTES:**
Paripurna Navasana
(Full Boat Pose)

(par-ee-POOR-nah nah-VAHS-anna)
paripurna = full, entire, complete
nava = boat

Type of Pose: Core Strengthener, Seated

Benefits:
• Strengthens the abdomen, hip flexors, and spine
• Stimulates the kidneys, thyroid and prostate glands, and intestines
• Helps relieve stress
• Improves digestion

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Asthma
• Diarrhea
• Headache
• Heart Problems
• Insomnia
• Low blood pressure
• Menstruation
• Pregnancy
• Neck injury: Sit with your back near a wall to perform this pose. As you tilt your torso back rest the back of your head on the wall.

Step by Step:
1. Sit on the floor with your legs straight in front of you. Press your hands on the floor a little behind your hips, fingers pointing toward the feet, and strengthen the arms. Lift through the top of the sternum and lean back slightly. As you do this make sure your back doesn’t round; continue to lengthen the front of your torso between the pubis and top sternum. Sit upright on the sit bones.

2. Exhale and bend your knees, then lift your feet off the floor, so that the thighs are angled about 45-50 degrees relative to the floor. Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor and lift your pubis toward your navel. If possible, slowly straighten your knees, raising the tips of your toes slightly above the level of your eyes. If this isn’t possible remain with your knees bent, perhaps lifting the shins parallel to the floor.

3. Stretch your arms alongside the legs, parallel to each other and the floor. Spread the shoulder blades across your back and reach strongly out through the fingers. If this isn’t possible, keep the hands on the floor beside your hips or hold on to the backs of your thighs.

4. While the lower belly should be firm, it shouldn’t get hard and thick. Try to keep the lower belly relatively flat. Press the heads of the thigh bones toward the floor to help anchor the pose and lift the top sternum.
Breathe easily. Tip the chin slightly toward the sternum so the base of the skull lifts lightly away from the back of the neck.

5. At first stay in the pose for 10-20 seconds. Gradually increase the time of your stay to 1 minute. Release the legs with an exhalation and sit upright on an inhalation.

**Beginner’s Tip:** You can practice a preparation for this pose periodically throughout your day without even leaving your chair. Sit on the front edge of a seat with your knees at right angles. Grab onto the sides of the seat with your hands and lean slightly forward. Firm your arms and lift your buttocks slightly off the seat, then raise your heels slightly off the floor (but not the balls of your feet). Let the heads of your thigh bones sink into the pull of gravity and push the top of your sternum forward and up.

**Modifications and Props:** Often it’s difficult to straighten the raised legs. Bend your knees and loop a strap around the soles of your feet, gripping it firmly in your hands. Inhale, lean the torso back, then exhale and lift and straighten your legs, adjusting the strap to keep it taut. Push the feet firmly against the strap.

**Deepen The Pose:** Full Boat is often presented as an abdominal strenghtener, which it is to a certain extent. But more importantly this pose strengthens the deep hip flexors that attach the inner thigh bones to the front of the spine. Learn to anchor the heads of the thighs bones deep in the pelvis and lift from that anchor through the front spine. Remember that the lower front belly should never get hard.

**Partnering:** A partner can help you bring the shoulder blades into your back and lift your sternum by placing his/her hands gently on your back and upper chest to give you something to lift from.

**Variations:**

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Uttanasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Baddha Konasana
- Halasana
- Salamba Sirsasana
- Utkatasana

**NOTES:**
Purvottanasana
(Incline Plank Pose)

Purvo= Front of Body, Eastward Facing

Type of Pose: Core Strengthener

Benefits:
• Strengthens the arms, wrists and legs
• Stretches the shoulders, chest, and front ankles

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Wrist injury
• With a neck injury, support the head on a wall or chair seat

Step by Step:
1. Sit in Dandasana (Staff Pose), with your hands about 6 inches behind your hips and your fingers pointing forward.

2. Roll the shoulders open and lift the chest. Press down through the heels as you lift the hips high up off the floor. Gaze at your feet. Internally rotate the thighs and then press the tailbone up toward the pubis. Point the toes forward, reaching them down toward the floor. Press the shoulder blades against your back torso to support the lift of the chest.

4. If you haven’t any neck injuries, slowly release the head back (from the space between the shoulder blades), without compressing the back of the neck.

5. Hold for 30 seconds, then on an exhalation, lower the hips back down to the earth and draw the chin back to parallel with the floor.

Beginner’s Tip:
If you have difficulty releasing and opening your shoulders in this pose, raise your hands off the floor on a pair of blocks or the seat of a metal folding chair.

Modifications and Props:
To get a feel for the work of the outer arms, loop and secure a strap around your arms just above your elbows. Imagine that the strap is tightening inward, pressing the outer arms in against the bones. Against this resistance, push the inner shoulder blades outward. (As in Downward Dog, there is an internal rotation of the lower arms and an external rotation of the upper arms).

Modified version:
REVERSE TABLE TOP
**Deepen The Pose:**
To increase the stretch in the backs of your legs, lift slightly up onto the balls of your feet, pulling your heels a half-inch or so away from the floor. Then draw your inner groins deep into the pelvis, lifting actively from the inner heels. Finally, from the height of the groins, lengthen the heels back onto the floor, moving the outer heels faster than the inner.

**Variations:**
To challenge yourself in this pose, inhale and raise your right leg parallel to the line of your torso, and hold for 30 seconds, keeping the hips level and pressing through the heel. Release with an exhalation and repeat on the left for the same length of time.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you learn how to work the top thighs in this pose. First perform Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog). Have your partner stand behind and loop a strap around your front groins, snuggling the strap into the crease between your top thighs and front pelvis. Your partner can pull on the strap parallel to the line of your spine (remind him/her to extend the arms fully, and keep the knees bent and chest lifted). Release the heads of your thigh bones deeper into your pelvis and lengthen your front torso away from the strap.

**Common Misalignments:**
**Sinking of the hips:** Emphasize lifting the tailbone toward pubis and drawing the pubis up toward the navel. Assist student by straddling her and placing belt underneath her buttocks (not her low back) and lifting up on the belt. Having the student engage her inner thighs will defend the lower back as well.

**Sinking of the chest/ shoulders rolled in toward the chest:** Emphasize breathing and expanding the chest as you inhale, pressing shoulder blades on the back for support of the lift.

**Compression of the neck:** Emphasize a lengthening in the back of the neck, beginning at the space between the shoulder blades. Even when head is fully back, there is still a subtle lengthening that occurs in the neck.

**Hinging in the wrists:** Emphasize that the shoulders, elbows and wrists are aligned and perpendicular to floor.

**Palms/ Underside of fingers lifting off floor:** Emphasize rooting the thumb and index fingers into mat.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Gomukhasana (arms only)
- Supta Virasana
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana
- Dhanurasana
- Urdhva Dhanurasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Paschimottanasana
- Adho Mukha Svanasana

**NOTES:**
Utkatasana (Fierce Pose)

(OOT-kah-TAHS-anna)

*utkata* = powerful, fierce

**Benefits:**
- Strengthens the ankles, thighs, calves, and spine
- Stretches shoulders and chest
- Stimulates the abdominal organs, diaphragm, and heart
- Reduces flat feet

**Contraindications and Cautions**
- Headache
- Insomnia
- Low blood pressure

**Step by Step:**
1. Stand in Tadasana. Inhale and raise your arms perpendicular to the floor. Either keep the arms parallel, palms facing inward, or join the palms.
2. Exhale and bend your knees, trying to take the thighs as nearly parallel to the floor as possible. The knees will project out over the feet, and the torso will lean slightly forward over the thighs until the front torso forms approximately a right angle with the tops of the thighs. Keep the inner thighs parallel to each other and press the heads of the thigh bones down toward the heels.
3. Firm your shoulder blades against the back. Take your tailbone down toward the floor and in toward your pubis to keep the lower back long.
4. Stay for 30 seconds to a minute. To come out of this pose straighten your knees with an inhalation, lifting strongly through the arms. Exhale and release your arms to your sides into Tadasana.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
To help you stay in this pose, perform it near a wall. Stand with your back to the wall, a few inches away from the wall. Adjust your position relative to the wall so that when you bend into the position, your tailbone just touches and is supported by the wall.

**Variations:**
As you bend your knees, lift up onto the balls of your feet and sit your buttocks down on your raised heels. Extend your arms forward, parallel to each other and the floor, palms down or facing inward.

Or

Revolve the torso to left, hooking right elbow into left knee/thigh for Parivrtta Utkatasana. Spread the elbows away from each other. Hug the shoulder blades to the back.
Parivrtta Utkatasana

Modifications and Props:
You can increase the strength of your thighs by squeezing a block or thick book between them during the pose.

Deepen The Pose:
The secret to a comfortable stay in Utkatasana is the release of the heads of the thigh bones toward the heels. Once in the pose, bring your hands to your tops thighs. Nestle the bases of your palms into the creases of the groins and push the heads of thighs toward the heels, digging the heels deep into the floor. Against these actions, lift the sitting bones up into the pelvis.

Partnering:
A partner can use either hands or feet to press your heels firmly into the ground.

Preparatory Poses:
- Virasana
- Bhujangasana
- Adho Mukha Svanasana

Follow-Up Poses:
- Tadasana
- Uttanasana

NOTES:
Vasisthasana
(Side Plank Pose)

This pose is a powerful arm and wrist strengthener and might also be called the One-Arm Balance. Here you’re balanced on the same-side hand and outer foot, with your torso and legs aligned at a 45-degree angle with the floor.

The full version of Vasisthasana, as taught by BKS Iyengar, with the top leg raised perpendicular to the floor, is beyond the capacity of most beginners. The pose described here is a modified version suitable for all levels of students.

(vah-sish-TAHS-anna)

Vasistha = literally means “most excellent, best, richest.” Vasistha is the name of several well-known sages in the yoga tradition.

Type of Pose: Core Stabilizer, One-Arm Balance

Benefits:
- Strengthens the arms, belly, and legs
- Stretches and strengthens the wrists
- Stretches the backs of the legs (in the full version described below)
- Improves sense of balance

Contraindications and Cautions:
Students with serious wrist, elbow, or shoulder injuries should avoid this pose.

Step by Step:
1. Perform Adho Mukha Svanasana. Shift onto the outside edge of your left foot, and stack your right foot on top of the left. Now swing your right hand onto your right hip, turn your torso to the right as you do, and support the weight of your body on the outer left foot and left hand.

2. Make sure that the supporting hand isn’t directly below its shoulder; position the hand slightly in front of its shoulder, so the supporting arm is angled a bit relative to the floor. Straighten the arm by firming the triceps muscle, and press the base of the index finger firmly against the floor.

3. Firm the scapulas and sacrum against the back torso. Strengthen the thighs, and press through the heels toward the floor. Align your entire body into one long diagonal line from the heels to the crown.

4. If you’d like you can stretch the top arm toward the ceiling, parallel to the line of the shoulders. Keep the head in a neutral position, or turn it to gaze up at the top hand.

5. Stay in this position for 15 to 30 seconds. Come back to Adho Mukha Svanasana, take a few breaths, and repeat
to the right side for the same length of time. Then return to Adho Mukha Svanasana for a few more breaths, and finally release into Balasana.

**Beginner’s Tip:** Beginners often have a difficult time sustaining this pose, even with the soles pressed to a wall. Perform Adho Mukha Svanasana with your heels up on a wall. Measure the distance between your right foot and right hand, then step the foot halfway to the hand. Keep the right foot on the floor for support and turn the toes out to the right. Then shift onto the outside of the left foot, press the sole against the wall, and turn onto the left hand as described above. In this position the bent leg will provide some extra support. Step back to Adho Mukha Svanasana at the end of your stay, then repeat to the other side.

**Modified Vasisthasana**

**Variations:** The full version of this pose, as taught by B. K. S. Iyengar, raises the top leg perpendicular to the floor. Perform the modified version as described above, either supported or unsupported by the wall. Exhale, bend the top knee, and draw the thigh into the torso. Reach inside the bent leg and use the index and middle fingers of the top hand to grab the big toe. Secure these fingers by wrapping them with the thumb. With an inhalation,

stretch the leg perpendicularly toward the ceiling. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds, then release the grip on the toe, and return the top foot to its original position. Repeat on the second side.

**Modifications and Props:** In order to increase the strength and stability of this pose, it’s helpful to work it with your soles pressing against a wall. Perform Adho Mukha Svanasana with your heels up on a wall, the balls of your feet on the floor. When you shift onto the outside of your left foot, press the sole against the wall. Similarly, when you stack your right foot on top of the left, press that sole to the wall. Then in the pose, push your heels actively into the wall.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Ardha Chandrasana
- Plank Pose
- Prasarita Padottanasana
- Supta Padangusthasana (for the full version)
- Supta Virasana

**Follow-up Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Vrksasana
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Chaturanga Dandasana
- Pincha Mayurasana
- Plank Pose
- Salamba Sirsasana

**NOTES:**
FORWARD BENDS

KEY POINTS:

1. Lift arches, engage the leg muscles (Tadasana Legs)

2. Draw the sacrum slightly forward (“Hinge from the hips”/ “Tip the pelvic bowl forward”)

3. Lengthen through the front torso (Lift pubis to navel, navel to heart, heart to sky)

4. Thigh bones internally rotate and press back to hamstrings

5. Lengthen on each inhalation. Fold deeper on each exhalation
Adho Mukha Svanasana
(Downward-Facing Dog)

(AH-doh MOO-kah shvah-NAHS-anna)
adho = downward, mukha = face,
svana = dog

Type of Pose: Down Dog is an all-over strengthening and rejuvenating stretch, with forward bend and inversion qualities.

Benefits:
• Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
• Energizes the body
• Stretches the shoulders, hamstrings, calves, arches and hands
• Strengthens the arms and legs
• Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
• Relieves menstrual discomfort when done with head supported
• Helps prevent osteoporosis
• Improves digestion
• Relieves headache, insomnia, back pain, and fatigue
• Therapeutic for high blood pressure, asthma, flat feet, sciatica, sinusitis

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Carpal tunnel syndrome
• Diarrhea
• Some women will find this pose uncomfortable during menstruation
• Pregnancy: Do not do this pose late-term
• High blood pressure or headache: support your head on a bolster or block, ears level between the arms.

Step By Step:
1. Come on to all fours (Table Top Position), with your knees directly below your hips and wrists underneath the shoulders. Extend the right arm forward on the floor and then the left, setting them at least shoulder-width apart & equidistant from the side edges of the mat. Spread the palms and fingers wide. Turn the hands so that the space between the index finger and middle finger of each hand face the front edge of the mat (creases of the wrists parallel to the top edge of the mat). Distribute the weight equally between all the mounds of the hands, and energetically lift the forearms away from the floor.

2. Curl the toes under and with an exhalation, lift just the knees up off the floor. With bent knees, press your hands into the floor and stretch the hips way back, extending through the spine.

3. Stretch through the arms, as you wrap the outer edges of the armpits in toward the face (widening the shoulder blades on the back). Seal the thumb and index finger to the floor (creating counter-rotation of the arms) and firm the outer triceps together. With an exhalation, press the
tops of the thigh bones back and descend the heels to the floor.

4. Lift the sit bones to open the back of the legs and then extend back through the spine even more. Lengthen the tailbone away from the pelvis and lightly lift the low belly. Keep the thighs engaged, internally rotating and pressing back. Spread the shoulder blades away from the spine and continue to lift the forearms away from the floor.

5. Position the head so that the ears are in line with the upper arms (you should be able to see your upper arms in your peripheral vision).

6. Stay in the pose for 3-5 breaths. To come out, lower the knees to the floor and rest in Balasana (Child’s Pose).

**Variations:**

**Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana (One-legged Downward Facing Dog):**
Inhale and raise your right leg to the level of the torso, Hold for 30 seconds, keeping the hips level. (Press the standing thigh back and anchor the heel down into the floor. Internally rotate the extended leg and reach out through the big toe mound of the back foot. Find equal weight in both arms and continue to press the hips back). Release with an exhalation and repeat on the left for the same length of time. *Hint:* to help maintain level hips, feel as though the standing hip is rising higher than the extended hip.

**Lift the Toes:**
Come into Down Dog and lift the toes (not the heels) off the floor. Feel a lifting of the inner arches and the muscles of the calves engage. Engage the thighs and press them back.

**Cross-lateral stretch:**
This variation helps to bring movement and flexibility to the sacrum bone: Take a micro-bend to the left knee. Press the left hand and the right heel down into the floor. Hold for 10 seconds. Now alternate, pressing the right hand and left heel firmly into the floor. Repeat 3 times each side. Feel the cross lateral stretch, and the movement/fluidity of the sacrum bone.

**Walking the Dog:**
Bend the right knee forward as you press the left heel down into the floor. Bend the left knee forward as you press the right heel down into the floor. Alternate the rooting of the heels. Move slowly, as if you are peeling the feet up off the floor (to help strengthen the arches). Continue pressing the weight back, and maintain level hips as you go.

**Alternate Heel Lifts:**
Maintaining straight legs, alternate lifting one heel off the floor at a time. Create some resistance in the movement, as if you have a 100-pound sac of potatoes on your hip as you lift the heel. Alternate heel lifts 4 times each.

**Modifications and Props:**
1. To get a feel for the work of the outer arms, loop and secure a strap around your arms just above your elbows. Imagine that the strap is tightening inward, pressing the
outer arms in against the bones. Against this resistance, press the inner shoulder blades outward.

2. Dog Pose at a wall: Stand with your hands touching the wall, shoulder-width apart, and at shoulder level (so that the wrists align with the shoulder joints). Set the feet below the hips, hip-distance apart. Press your hands into the wall as you reach the sit bones back, stretching through the spine and hamstrings. For tighter hips and hamstrings, raise the hands higher than shoulder height on the wall, adjusting so that the spine can lengthen. Look for long, clear energy lines, from wrists to shoulders, shoulders to hips, hips to feet.

3. Place a block underneath the forehead to make a more restorative Dog Pose.

Beginner’s Tips:
1. One way to measure a good, more or less standard, distance between your hands and your feet for this pose is to lie prone on your abdomen first. Place your palms on the mat with your fingers spread wide and your thumbs right at the level of your nipple line. Then, without moving your hands or your feet, come up to a kneeling position. Keep your head lifted in this kneeling position -- don’t relax it toward the floor until you come into the full pose.

Then from kneeling, again without repositioning your hands or feet, come into Adho Mukha Svanasana. You can adjust the distance between your hands and feet slightly from there as necessary. Ingrain that approximate distance between your hands and feet into your cellular memory, even though it is not an absolute -- sometimes you will want your pose to be longer or shorter for various reasons.

2. If you have difficulty releasing and opening your shoulders in this pose, raise your hands off the floor on a pair of blocks or the seat of a metal folding chair. Another option is to place the hands wider than shoulder-width apart.

3. Don’t be discouraged if the heels don’t meet the floor. Be patient as your hips and hamstrings open. Place a block underneath the heels, so that you have something to ground into.

Deepen the Pose:
To increase the stretch in the backs of the legs, lift slightly up onto the balls of the feet, pulling the heels a half-inch or so away from the floor. Then draw the inner groins deep into the pelvis, lifting actively from the inner heels. Finally, from the height of the groins, lengthen the heels back onto the floor, moving the outer heels faster than the inner.

Common Misalignments:
Rounded upper back: Ask her to root her hands as she presses her hips back with the intention of lengthening the spine. Use the second assist below to help her find the length.

Hyper-extended low back: Ask her to draw the lower belly in and up, and lengthen the tailbone away from the pelvis (and/or use second assist below).

More weight in shoulders, arms and wrists, than in the legs (Shoulders moving forward): Ask her to press back, get the weight back into the legs. Use second assist below.
Hinging at the neck: Ask him to bring his ears in line with the upper arms, lengthening through the back of the neck.

Compression of the upper back (shoulder blades caving in toward spine): externally rotate the upper arms (wrap the outer edges of the armpits in toward the face) and then seal thumb and index finger to floor.

Partnering/Assists:
1. An assist to help the student learn how to press the thigh bones back: First have the student come into Adho Mukha Svanasana. Stand behind her and loop a strap around the front groins, snuggling the strap into the crease between the top thighs and front pelvis. Wrap the strap tightly around your hands so that you have just a little slack, bend your elbows and draw your shoulder blades onto your back. Keep your knees bent and chest lifted. Lean your weight back, pulling on the strap parallel to the line of her spine. Ask the student to release the heads (top/center) of the thigh bones deeper into the pelvis and lengthen the front torso away from the strap.

2. An assist to help extend the spine and get the weight back into the legs: Stand with one foot in between your partner’s hands, the opposite leg slightly forward and to her side. Take the heel of your hands to the rim of her pelvis, fingers spread wide. Use the strength of your legs to assist you as you lift her hips up and back. Then press her hips slightly down, assisting in the descending of the heels toward the floor. (Assister, keep your elbows hugging into your body, shoulders drawn on to your back as you assist).

Preparatory Poses:
- Plank
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)

Follow Up Poses:
- Standing Poses
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
- Sirsasana (Headstand)

NOTES:
Dolphin Pose

**Type of Pose:** Shoulder Opener, Partial Inversion/Forward Bend

**Benefits:**
- Helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Stretches the shoulders, hamstrings, calves, and arches
- Strengthens the arms and legs
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause, menstrual discomfort
- Helps prevent osteoporosis
- Improves digestion
- Relieves headache, insomnia, back pain, and fatigue
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, asthma, flat feet, sciatica

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
Shoulder or neck injuries, keep knees bent

**Step by Step:**
1. Come onto the floor on your hands and knees. Set your knees directly below your hips and your forearms on the floor with your shoulders directly above your elbows. Firmly press your palms together and your forearms into the floor.

2. Curl your toes under, then exhale and lift your knees away from the floor. At first keep the knees slightly bent and the heels lifted away from the floor. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of your pelvis and press it lightly toward the pubis. Against this resistance, lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling, and from your inner ankles draw the inner legs up into the groins.

3. Continue to press the forearms actively into the floor. Firm your shoulder blades against your back, then widen them away from the spine and draw them toward the tailbone. Hold your head between the upper arms; don't let it hang or press heavily against the floor.

4. You can straighten your knees if you like, but if your upper back rounds it's best to keep them bent. Continue to lengthen your tailbone away from the pelvis and lift the top of your sternum away from the floor.

5. Stay between 30 seconds to one minute. Then release your knees to the floor with an exhale.

**Variations:**
To challenge yourself in this pose, inhale and raise your right leg parallel to the line of your torso, and hold for 30 seconds, keeping the hips level and pressing through the heel. Release and repeat.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Plank Pose
- Gomukhasana (arms only)

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Sirsasana (Headstand)
- Pincha Mayurasana (Forearm Balance)
Janu Sirsasana
(Head-to-Knee Pose)

(JAH-new shear-SHAHS-anna)
janu = knee
sirsa = head

Type of Pose: Seated Forward Bend -
A forward bend for all levels of students,
Janu Sirsasana is also a spinal twist.

Benefits:
• Calms the brain and helps relieve mild depression
• Stretches the spine, shoulders, hamstrings, and groins
• Stimulates the liver and kidneys
• Improves digestion
• Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
• Relieves anxiety, fatigue, headache, menstrual discomfort
• Therapeutic for high blood pressure, insomnia, and sinusitis
• Strengthens the back muscles during pregnancy (up to second trimester),
done without coming forward, keeping your back spine concave and front torso long.

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Asthma
• Diarrhea
• Knee injury: Don’t flex the injured knee completely and support it on a folded blanket.

Step by Step:
1. Sit on the floor with your sit bones lifted on a folded blanket and your legs straight in front of you. Inhale, bend your right knee, and draw the heel back toward your pelvis. Rest your right foot sole lightly against your inner left thigh, and lay the outer right leg on the floor, with the shin at a right angle to the left leg (if your right knee doesn’t rest comfortably on the floor, support it with a folded blanket).

2. Activate the muscles of the extended leg and then find a neutral foot (not pointed, not flexed, but in between). Internally rotate the left thigh and then press it down toward the floor (as in a Tadasana leg), but be sure that the left knee cap stays facing upward to the ceiling. Activate the bent (right) leg: Roll the bent (right) thigh outward to open the hip. Actively flex the foot of the bent leg to protect the knee joint and to allow for a natural opening of the pelvis. In this posture, the straight leg has a closed hip, and the bent leg has an open hip.

3. Place your left fingertips on the floor next to the hip, right hand at the inner right groin, where the thigh joins the pelvis. Inhale, lengthen through the front torso. Exhale, press your right hand against the inner right groin as you turn the torso slightly to the left – to align the navel with the middle of the left thigh.
4. Inhale, lift the right arm up to the sky (palm facing midline). Exhale, hinge at the hips, extending the torso over the leg. Take the right hand to the outer edge of the left foot. Inhale, lengthen the heart forward and the sit bones back. Exhale, extend forward from the groins.

5. Be sure not to pull yourself forcefully into the forward bend, hunching the back and shortening the front torso. As you descend, bend your elbows out to the sides and lift them away from the floor.

6. Lengthen forward into a comfortable stretch. The lower belly should touch the thighs first, the head last. Stay in the pose anywhere from 1 to 3 minutes. Come up with an inhalation and repeat the instructions with the legs reversed for the same length of time.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
If you feel you are collapsing or hyper-extending in the extended leg’s knee, activate the calf muscle and press the heel down into the floor.

Make sure the bent-leg foot doesn’t slide under the straight leg. You should be able to look down and see the sole of the foot. Keep the bent-leg foot active too. Broaden the top of the foot on the floor and press the heel toward the inner groin of the straight leg.

**Modifications and Props:**
If you can’t comfortably reach the extended-leg foot, use a strap. Loop it around the sole of the foot and hold it with your arms fully extended. Be sure not to pull yourself forward when using the strap. Use the strap to assist you in finding length along the front torso and then walk your hands lightly down the strap as you exhale.

**Variations:**
In some schools of yoga this pose is also performed with the perineum sitting on the bent-knee heel. The bent-knee leg is angled out to the side at somewhat less than 90 degrees.

**Variations for the hands/arms:**
#1. Grasp the foot with both hands, thumbs on the top of the foot.
#2. Criss-cross the forearms, taking the right hand to the outer edge of the left foot, the left hand to the outer edge of the left foot. Bend your elbows away from each other and lightly lift them off the floor for a nice shoulder opener.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you learn about grounding the bent-leg thigh. Have your partner stand behind you and press the inner edge of his/her foot (or his hand) against the inner groin of your bent leg. As you lengthen forward into the pose, see if you can release the head of the thigh away from the pressure of the foot, toward the floor.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Baddha Konasana
- Balasana (Child’s Pose)
- Supta Padangusthasana Uttanasana
- Vrksasana

**Follow-up Poses:**
- Seated forward bends
Marjaryasana (Cat Pose)

Marjari = Cat

Type of Pose: Spinal flex with forward bend qualities

Benefits:
- Stretches the back torso and neck
- Provides a gentle massage to the spine and belly organs

Contraindications and Cautions:
With a neck injury, keep the head in line with the torso.

Step by Step:
1. Start on your hands and knees in a "tabletop" position. Make sure your knees are set directly below your hips and your wrists, elbows and shoulders are in line and perpendicular to the floor. Center your head in a neutral position, eyes looking at the floor.

2. Inhale, lightly lift the low belly. Exhale, scoop the tail bone under as you round the back toward the ceiling. Feel as though the center of your spine is being lifted to the ceiling and the space between each vertebra is opening. Release your head toward the floor, but don’t force your chin to your chest.

3. Initiating movement from your tailbone, inhale and uncoil the spine, coming back to neutral "tabletop" position.

4. This pose is often paired with Cow Pose on the inhale for a gentle, flowing vinyasa.

Props: Place blanket under knees for added comfort.

Preparatory Poses:
- Balasana (Child’s Pose)
- Garudasana (Eagle Pose - arms only)

Follow-Up Poses:
- Cow Pose
Pachimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)

Paschimottanasana can help a distracted mind unwind.

(POSH-ee-moh-tan-AHS-anna)
paschimottana = intense stretch of the west
pashima = west
uttana = intense stretch

Literally translated as "intense stretch of the west."

**Type of Pose:** Seated Forward Bend

**Benefits:**
- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Stretches the spine, shoulders, hamstrings
- Stimulates the liver, kidneys, ovaries, and uterus
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause and menstrual discomfort
- Soothes headache and anxiety and reduces fatigue
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, infertility, insomnia, and sinusitis
- Traditional texts say that Paschimottanasana increases appetite, reduces obesity, and cures diseases.

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
- Asthma
- Diarrhea
- Back injury: Only perform this pose under the supervision of an experienced teacher.

**Step by Step:**

1. Sit in Dandasana (Staff Pose) with your legs extended in front of you, fingertips to the floor outside the hips. Rock slightly onto your left buttock, and pull the flesh away from your right glute, (lifting your gift), allowing the right sit bone to sit directly on the floor. Repeat on the other side. (You may also sit on a blanket, with your sitting bones set on the blanket’s edge).

2. Draw the big toes together and leave a small space between the heels. Reach out actively through the big toe mounds as you pull the pinky toes back in toward the body (Creating the “neutral” position of the foot). Engage the legs. Hug the muscles of the calves and thighs to the bones. Create a slight internal rotation to the thighs (by rolling the outer thighs in) and then lightly press them down into the floor. Press the fingertips down into the floor as you inhale and extend up through the spine. Exhale, move the base of the shoulder blades into the back, supporting a lift to the top chest.

3. Inhale, lift up through the crown of your and press the inner thighs down into the floor. Draw the sacrum forward, lift the low belly, and with an exhalation, fold
forward from the hips. Extend the torso out and over the legs. Keep the sit bones rooting down into the mat and on your next inhalation, lift the navel toward the heart and the heart away from the navel to find some more length.

As you exhale, lower the torso closer to the thighs, touching the lower belly to the thighs first, then the upper belly, then the ribs. Lastly, round the upper spine to release the forehead toward the thighs.

4. Options for your hands: 1. Place the hands on the floor outside the legs. 2. Clasp your hands around the soles of the feet (thumbs on top foot). 3. Wrap your “peace fingers” (index finger and thumb) around the big toes. 4. Right hand to outer left foot, left hand to outer right foot (bend and lift the elbows). 5. (ADVANCED): Extend the wrists beyond the edges of the feet, turn the back of the right hand to face the sole of the foot and then clasp the left hand around the right wrist (don’t bend at the elbows in this option, keep them extended).

5. To deepen further into the pose, don’t forcefully pull yourself into the forward bend. Instead, on each inhalation, lengthen the front torso, keeping the heart raised. And with each exhalation, draw the groins deeper into the pelvis and release further down into the pose. Let the release come from the hamstrings, not the low back. (If you are holding the feet, bend the elbows out to the sides and lift them away from the floor).

**Beginner’s Tip:** Never force yourself into a forward bend, especially when sitting on the floor. Coming forward, as soon as you feel the space between your pubis and navel shortening, stop, lift up slightly, and lengthen again. Often, because of tightness in the backs of the legs, a beginner’s forward bend doesn’t go very far forward and might look more like sitting up straight.

**Modifications and Props:** Most students should sit up on a folded blanket in this pose, and it can be extremely helpful for anyone to use a strap looped around the soles of the feet. The strap is used to find length in the front torso, not to pull you down closer to the legs. Students with extremely tight hamstrings can place a rolled up blanket under their knees.

**Variations:** Urdhva Mukha Paschimottanasana: Lie on your back, exhale, and bend your knees into your torso. Then inhale and extend the heels toward the ceiling. Slowly, on an exhalation, swing your feet toward the floor above your head. You may or may not be able to reach all the way to the floor. Try not to let the back of the pelvis lift very far from the floor—this is an upside-down version of Paschimottanasana (Seated forward bend, not Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulder Stand) or Halasana (Plow). This version can also be done sitting upright on the sit bones and clasping the big toes with the peace fingers.
**URDHVA MUKHA PACHIMOTTANASANA**

**Partnering/Assists:** A partner can help you release your lower back in this pose. Have your partner stand behind you facing your back. Perform the pose, then have your partner press his/her hands against your lower back and pelvis. The hands should be turned so the fingers point towards your tailbone. Remember though that the pressure isn’t to push you deeper into the forward bend; rather, gentle pressure (parallel to the line of the back) encourages the back spine and tailbone to lengthen away from the torso. Extend the front torso against this downward action.

Another assist, is to sit back to back and as your student bends forward, you will lie back on their back giving them a soft pressure. Depending on the student’s flexibility you may not be reclined at all (just acting as a base) or only slightly back, or possibly laying completely on top of them, allow your arms to either spay out to the sides or up over head and back to give you a nice stretch in the chest and armpits.

**Deepen The Pose:** Once you are fully in the forward bend you can re-extend the elbows. There are several ways to do this. You can clasp your hands around the soles of the feet, or turn the back of one hand to the soles and grip its wrist with the other hand. You can also place a block against the soles of your feet and grip its sides with your hands.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Balasana (Child’s Pose/ Wisdom Pose)
- Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Pose)
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Deep twists
- Ex: Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose)

**NOTES:**
Padahastasana
(Foot-to-Hand Forward Bend)
(Pah-dah-Hast-asana)

Type of Pose: Standing Forward Bend
(Variation of Uttanasana)

Benefits:
• Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
• Stimulates the liver and kidneys
• Stretches the hamstrings, calves, and hips
• Strengthens the thighs and knees
• Improves digestion
• Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
• Reduces fatigue and anxiety
• Relieves headache and insomnia
• Therapeutic for asthma, high blood pressure, infertility, osteoporosis, and sinusitis

Contraindications/Cautions:
Avoid this pose with lower back or neck injuries

Step by Step:
1. Stand in Tadasana, hands on hips (feet together or hip width distance apart). Exhale and hinge forward from the hip joints, not from the waist. As you descend, draw the front torso out of the groins and open the space between the pubis and top sternum. As in all the forward bends, the emphasis is on lengthening the front torso as you move more fully into the position.

2. Bend your knees and place the hands under the feet (palms facing up), bringing the toes to meet the wrists.

3. Pull the navel into the spine and with an inhalation, straighten your arms and lift your front torso away from your thighs, creating a gentle concave in the back (Sit bones and heart lift). Hold for a few breaths, exhale and lengthen down bending your elbows out to the sides, framing the head. Lift the shoulders away from the neck and draw the shoulder blades down the back. Keep the weight evenly distributed through the feet and lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling. Turn the top thighs slightly inward.
4. With each inhalation in the pose, lift and lengthen the front torso just slightly; with each exhalation, release a little more fully into the forward bend. In this way the torso oscillates almost imperceptibly with the breath. Let your head hang from the root of the neck, which is deep in the upper back, between the shoulder blades. Stay in the position for 20 seconds.

5. To come out of the pose, release the hands. Bring the hands to the hips and inhale, come up with a neutral back.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
For tight hamstrings, work with the knees bent.

**Misalignments:**
Legs should be perpendicular (90°) to the floor. Watch for students leaning back into the hamstrings.

**NOTES:**
Padangusthasana
(Big Toe Pose)

(Pa-dang-us-thas-anna)

**Type of Pose:** Standing Forward Bend
**(Variation of Uttanasana)**

**Benefits:**
- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Stimulates the liver and kidneys
- Stretches the hamstrings, calves, and hips
- Strengthens the thighs and knees
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Reduces fatigue and anxiety
- Relieves headache and insomnia
- Therapeutic for asthma, high blood pressure, infertility, osteoporosis, and sinusitis

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
Avoid this pose with lower back or neck injuries

**Step by Step:**
1. Stand in Tadasana, hands on the hips (feet together or hip-bone distance apart). Exhale and hinge forward from the hip joints. Come down half-way, lift the sit bones to the sky and reach the heart forward. Sink down through the sacrum lengthen the torso down toward the thighs. As in all the forward bends, the emphasis is on lengthening the front torso as you lower and fold.

2. Bend your knees as much as you need to so that you can wrap the index and middle finger of each hand around the big toe, joining the thumbs (“yogi grip”). Bend the elbows away from each other. Press your toes down against your fingers, and with an inhalation, press the thigh bones gently back as you lift torso, straightening your elbows. Exhale through the nose. Inhale, lift the heart and the sit bones. Pull the navel in toward the spine. Depending on your flexibility, your lower back will hollow to a greater or lesser degree. As you do this, release the hamstrings and hollow the lower belly (below your navel) as well, lightly lifting it toward the back of your pelvis.
3. Lift the top of the sternum as high as you can, but take care not to lift your head so far that you compress the back of your neck. Keep your forehead relaxed.

4. For the next few inhalations, lift the torso strongly as you continue to actively contract the front thighs; on each successive exhalation, strongly lift your sitting bones as you consciously relax your hamstrings. As you do this, deepen the hollow in your lower back.

5. Finally exhale, bend your elbows out to the sides, pull up on your toes, lengthen the front and sides of your torso, and gently lower into the forward bend. Let your head hang from the root of the neck, which is deep in the center of the shoulder blades. Draw the shoulder blades down the back.

6. If you have very long hamstrings, you can draw your forehead toward your shins. But if your hamstrings are short, it’s better to focus on keeping the front torso long. Hunching into a forward bend isn’t safe for your lower back and does nothing to lengthen your hamstrings.

7. Hold the final position for one minute. Then release your toes, bring your hands to your hips, and re-lengthen your front torso. With an inhale, draw the torso back to upright.

Beginner’s Tip: If you can’t reach the toes, hold the backs of the calves or thighs, or if you can’t reach your toes without overly rounding your back, pass a strap under the ball of each foot and hold the straps.

Deepen The Pose: To increase the stretch in the backs of your legs, lift slightly up onto the balls of your feet, pulling your heels a half-inch or so away from the floor. Then draw your inner groins deep into the pelvis, lifting actively from the inner heels. Finally, from the height of the groins, lengthen the heels back onto the floor, moving the outer heels faster than the inner.

Variations: To challenge yourself in this pose, inhale and raise your right leg parallel to the line of your torso, and hold for 30 seconds, keeping the hips level and pressing through the heel. Release with an exhalation and repeat on the left for the same length of time.
**Misalignments:** Legs should be perpendicular (90°) to the floor. Watch for students leaning back into the heels.

**Partnering:** A partner can help you learn how to work the top thighs in this pose. First perform Adho Mukha Svanasana. Have your partner stand behind and loop a strap around your front groins, snuggling the strap into the crease between your top thighs and front pelvis. Your partner can pull on the strap parallel to the line of your spine (remind him/her to extend the arms fully, and keep the knees bent and chest lifted). Release the heads of your thigh bones deeper into your pelvis and lengthen your front torso away from the strap.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
- Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Utkatasana (Chair Pose)
- Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)

**NOTES:**
Parsvottanasana
(Intense Side Stretch)

(parsh-VOH-tahn-ahs-anna)

*parsh* = side, flank  
*ut* = intense  
*tan* = to stretch or extend (compare the Latin verb tendere, “to stretch or extend”)

**Type of Pose:** Standing Forward Bend  
(Closed Hip Posture)

**Benefits:**
- Calms the brain
- Stretches the spine, shoulders and wrists (in the full pose), hips, and hamstrings
- Strengthens the legs
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Improves posture and sense of balance
- Improves digestion

**Contraindications:**
If you have a back injury or high blood pressure, avoid the full forward bend; instead do Ardha Parsvottanasana  
(pronounced are-dah = half) a couple of feet from and facing a wall. With an exhalation lower your torso parallel to the floor and reach your hands out to the wall. Press your palms actively into the wall (preferably with your elbows fully extended), keeping your front torso longer than your back.

**Step by Step:**
1. Stand in Tadasana with the hands on the hips, the feet hip-bone distance apart.
2. Step the right foot back 3 - 4 feet, landing on separate tracks (heels hip-bone distance apart). If the back heel doesn’t reach the floor comfortably, shorten the stance. Turn the back toes out just slightly (about 20 degrees). Point the front toes straight ahead.
3. Lift the toes, spread them wide and place them back down onto mat. Lift the arches of the feet, drawing muscular energy up the inner legs and into the pelvis. Activate the calf muscle of the front leg and press it forward toward the shin. See that the front knee aligns with the center of the foot (2nd toe).
4. Straighten the legs. Draw the left hip back and the left hip forward to square the hips. Internally rotate the right thigh and then press it back into space, anchoring the heel to the floor.
5. Option to bring arms behind the back, clasping elbows, or in Reverse Namaste/Prstanjali Mudra (prish-ta = “back/rear”). (Or keep hands on the hips).
6. Compact the hips, squeezing the outer thighs together. Draw the lower belly in and up and lift the top of the chest to the ceiling, creating a gentle upper back bend.
7. Maintain this upper back bend as you exhale, and extend out from the hips and over the front leg. Come down ½-way and bring fingertips to the shin, floor or block(s).

8. Draw the left hip up and back, and the right hip down and forward to level the hips. Inhale, reach the heart forward. Exhale, deepen the release over the front leg. Finally, round the upper back to release the forehead.

9. Stay in for 3-5 breaths. Root down through the back heel as you inhale & draw the torso up and out of the pose. Bend the knees & step forward into Tadasana.

**Beginners Tip:** There’s a middle position for the hands and arms, between having the hands on the floor and pressing them together behind the back. Simply cross the arms behind the back, parallel to the waist. Hold each elbow with the opposite hand. When the right leg is in front, bring the right arm around behind the back first; when the left leg is in front, bring the left arm first.

Beginners may use a shorter stance and should align the midline of the torso over the inner side of the front thigh. Also, maintain a slight micro-bend to the front knee, especially when coming out of the pose.

**Deepen the Pose:** Advanced students - rotate the torso and bring its midline down over the midline of the front thigh.

**Variations:** As mentioned above, the full version of this pose is performed with the hands behind the back in Anjali Mudra, a hand position sometimes called Pristanjali Mudra (*prish-TOHN-jolly; prishta = “the back, the rear of anything”), or sometimes Paschima Namaskar (*posh-EE-mah nam-AHS-car; pashima = “west”; namaskar = “to greet or salute”).

Stand in Tadasana with the hands in Anjali Mudra in front of the heart. Bend your knees slightly and round your back, hunching your shoulders. Exhale, inwardly rotate your arms and sweep them around behind your back. Press the palms together with the thumbs resting on your sacrum, so the fingers point toward the floor. First turn the wrists so the fingers point toward the sacrum, then continue turning until the fingers point toward your head. Your pinkies will now press against your back torso. Slide your hands up your back, lifting and opening your chest as you do. If you can, position the hands between the scapulas, with the pinkies pressing firmly against the spine. Keep the palms spreading together as much as possible. Roll the front shoulders up and back, and lengthen down from the back armpits through the elbows toward the floor. Now follow the instructions for the pose.

**Modifications and Props:** If you find your back heel lifting as you bend into this pose, practice with your back heel pressed to a wall. The heel’s contact with the wall will help you keep it grounded. Another way to work with a lifting heel is to raise it on an incline prop.
It is very helpful to use 2 blocks under the hands as you come down ½-way. At this point, you can really get in there and work with the hips.

**Partnering:** A partner can help you anchor the heads of the thighs, which in turn will help you ground the heels and lengthen the spine. Take the feet apart and turn the torso. Have your partner stand behind you and loop a strap over your groins, just in the creases where the thighs join the pelvis. Then bend forward into the pose. Your partner should pull firmly on the strap, dragging the groins deeper into the pelvis. From this action, press actively into the back heel and lengthen the spine over the front thigh.

A partner can also assist you in observing your hips to see if they are level. If they are not, she can communicate to you which hip needs to be lifted or lowered, or she can gently take her fingertips to your hip creases to assist you in leveling the hips.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Gomukhasana (Cow-Face Pose—especially the arm position)
- Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Leg Forward Bend)
- Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)
- Uttanasana (Forward Bend)
- Utthita Parsvakonasana (Side Angle Pose)
- Utthita Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:**
Parsvottanasana is a good standing pose preparation for seated forward bends and twists. Other follow-ups include:
- Dandasana (Seated Staff Pose)
- Pincha Mayurasana (Forearm Balance)
- Salabhasana (Locust Pose)
- Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulder stand)
- Sirsasana (Headstand)

**NOTES:**
**Prasarita Padottanasana**  
(Wide-legged Forward Bend)  

(pra-sa-rita  pa-dot-anas-ana)  

**Type of Pose:** Standing Forward Bend  

**Benefits:**  
- Strengthens and stretches the inner and back legs and spine  
- Tones the abdominal organs  
- Calms the brain and sympathetic nervous system  
- Relieves mild backache, fatigue, and mild depression  
- Energizes heart and lungs; reduces blood pressure  
- Relieves stomach ache by reducing acidity  
- Strengthens knees joint & makes hip joint supple  
- Regulates menstrual flow  

**Contraindications/ Cautions:**  
- Lower-back problems: Avoid the full forward bend.  
- Low blood pressure – come out gradually to avoid dizziness.  
- If you are able to reach your head to the ground, avoid tilting head and compressing neck.  

**Step by Step:**  
1. Stand in Tadasana, facing one of the long edges of your sticky mat, then step the feet out 4 ½ to 5 feet (depending on your height and practice: taller people should step wider, so shall beginners). Place the hands on your hips. Pigeon toe the feet slightly, so that the outer edges are parallel to the sides of the mat. Engage the calf muscles forward and the thigh muscles back. Draw the lower belly in and up and lift the heart, creating a mild upper backbend.  

2. Exhale, maintain the length of the front torso, as you slowly hinge forward from the hip joints, drawing the torso down ½ way. As your torso approaches parallel to the floor, bring your fingertips onto the floor directly below your shoulders. On an inhalation, lift the sit bones, pull the navel into the spine and lengthen the heart forward. (The back will be slightly concave - from the tailbone to the base of the skull). Draw both shoulder blades down the back and gaze about 18 inches in front of you.
3. On an exhalation, bend the elbows straight back, and release the torso down from the sacrum. Walk the hands back between the feet and if possible, rest the crown of your head on the floor.

4. Be sure to keep your arms parallel to each other and widen the shoulder blades across the back. Draw your shoulders away from your ears.

5. Stay in the pose anywhere from 20 seconds to 1 minute. To come out, bring your hands back on the floor below your shoulders and lift and lengthen through the torso. Then with an inhalation, rest your hands on your hips, pull your tail bone down toward the floor, and draw the torso up. Walk or hop your feet back into Tadasana.

Beginner’s Tips:
Some beginners aren’t able to easily bring their hands to the floor and need a good deal of support in this forward bend to protect their lower back. Try raising the hands off the floor by resting each on the end of a block. If the back is still rounded, then use a folding chair to support the forearms. Always remember in forward bends to emphasize the length of the front torso.

Deepen The Pose: When you come down ½ way – internally rotate the thighs, press them back into space, and then move the inner thighs toward the outer thighs (hollowing out the groins), creating a widening in the base of the pelvis, or a “wishbone effect”.

Variations:
Option #1: The pose as described here is technically known as Prasarita Padottanasana I. Prasarita Padottanasana II is a more challenging variation. Perform step 1 above then bring the hands behind the back - into prstanjali mudra. To do this lean the torso slightly forward and round the back. Then press the palms together behind the back with the thumbs resting on the sacrum, fingers pointing toward the floor. Exhale and turn the fingers, first toward the back, then upward, so they point toward the ceiling. Slip the pinky sides of the hands up the back as high as possible, ideally between the shoulder blades. Roll the shoulders back and lift the chest, pressing the pinkies deeply into the spine. Finally exhale into the forward bend and bring the head close to or onto the floor. If this hand position isn’t possible, simply cross arms behind the back and hold the elbows with the opposite hands.

Option #2: Clasp the hands behind the back and as you exhale to come forward, lift the interlaced hands toward the ceiling.

Option #3: Have your hand in Anjali Mudra (at the heart center) throughout the pose.

Misalignments: Watch for students leaning back into their knees. Have them shift their weight slightly forward to the balls of the feet, drawing the sit bones up towards the sky thus causing the legs to become perpendicular to the floor. This will help to increase the hamstring stretch and will protect the knees.
Preparatory Poses:
- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
- Baddah Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Uttanasana (Forward Bend)

Follow Up Poses:
- Baddah Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Bakasana (Crow Pose)
- Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)

NOTES:
Upavistha Konasana
(Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend)

(oo-pah-VEESH-tah cone-AHS-anna)

*upavistha* = seated, sitting

*kona* = angle

**Type of Pose:** Seated Forward Bend

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the insides and backs of the legs
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Strengthens the spine
- Calms the brain
- Releases groins

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
Lower-back injury: Sit up high on a folded blanket and keep your torso relatively upright.

**Step by Step:**
1. Sit in Dandasana, then lean your torso back slightly on your hands and lift and open your legs to an angle of about 90 degrees (the legs should form an approximate right angle, with the pubis at the apex). Press your hands against the floor and slide your buttocks forward, widening the legs another 10 to 20 degrees. Draw the flesh of the sit bones back and out to sit upright. If you can’t sit comfortably on the floor, raise your buttocks on a blanket folded into a triangle.

2. Point the knee caps straight up toward the ceiling. Reach out through your heels and then stretch your soles, pressing out through the balls of the feet.

3. Inhale, lift and lengthen through the front torso as you press the thigh bones down into the floor. Exhale, and with you knee caps pointing straight up, hinge from the hips and walk the hands forward between your legs. Keep your arms long. As with all forward bends, the emphasis is on moving from the hip joints and maintaining the length of the front torso. As soon as you find yourself bending from the waist, stop, re-establish the length from the pubis to the navel, and continue forward if possible.

4. Increase the forward bend on each exhalation until you feel a comfortable stretch in the backs of your legs. Stay in the pose 1 minute or longer. Then come up on an inhalation with a long front torso.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
Upavistha Konasana is a difficult forward bend for many beginners. If you have trouble bending even a little bit forward, bend your knees slightly. You might even
support your knees on thinly rolled blankets; but remember, as you move into the forward bend, it’s still important keep the knee caps pointing toward the ceiling.

It might be more comfortable for you to glide the hands down the legs, rather than walking them forward. (Be mindful not to put pressure on your knees with the weight of your torso though!)

**Deepen The Pose:** Advanced students can help themselves move into the forward bend. Perform steps 1 and 2 in the main description above. Then reach out and wrap your index and middle fingers around the big toes, each pair of fingers secured in place with the thumb. Pull back on the toes as you lean forward, but push actively through the bases of the big toes to keep the inner and outer ankles even. Bend your elbows out to the sides and lift them away from the floor as your torso descends.

**Variations:** Upavistha Konasana has a twisted variation: Parivritta Upavistha Konasana. From the upright position described in step 1, turn your torso to the right with an exhalation. Press your left hand to the outside of your right thigh and right hand on the floor to the outside of your right hip. With a series of exhalations, walk your left hand down along the outside of the leg. Press the top of the left thigh into the floor to serve as the anchor for this movement. Stop at a comfortable place along the way or, if your flexibility allows it, reach your left hand to the outside of your right foot. Make sure, as you twist to the right and move the hand along the leg, that you don’t shorten your right side; continue pressing your right hand against the floor to help lengthen that side of the torso. Stay for a minute. To leave this pose, exhale and swing your torso back to neutral. Then return to upright with an inhalation and repeat to the left.

**LATERAL FLEXION VARIATION** – (Parsva Upavistha Konasana)

**Modifications and Props:** Beginners might not be able to bring the torso forward toward the floor. Take a bolster or a thickly rolled blanket and lay it on the floor in front of you, parallel to the torso. Exhale into the forward bend and lay your torso down on this support. Another option is to rest the forehead on a block as you come forward.

**Partnering:**
Have a partner squat behind you, placing his hands at your hip creases. Your partner will then place some pressure on your thighs, helping you to descend the thighs as you fold forward. He then can assist you by placing the heel of his right hand on your sacrum (fingers point down) and his left hand about 6 inches above the right (fingers point up). He then lightly presses the hands in toward your body and then energetically spreads them away from
each other (without actually moving his hands). This will help traction the lower spine and assist you in a deeper fold.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Baddha Konasana
- Dandasana
- Prasarita Padottanasana
- Supta Baddha Konasana
- Supta Padangusthasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
Upavistha Konasana is a good preparation for most of the seated forward bends and twists, as well as the wide-leg standing poses. It might also be used to get ready for:
- Baddha Konasana
- Bakasana
- Gomukhasana
- Malasana
- Padmasana
- Siddhasana or Sukhasana
- Supta Padangusthasana

**NOTES:**
Uttanasana
(Standing Forward Bend)

(OOT-tan-AHS-ahna)

ut = intense
tan = to stretch or extend

Type of Pose: Standing Forward Bend

Benefits:
- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Stimulates the liver and kidneys
- Stretches the hamstrings, calves, and hips
- Strengthens the thighs and knees
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Reduces fatigue and anxiety
- Relieves headache and insomnia
- Therapeutic for asthma, high blood pressure, infertility, osteoporosis, and sinusitis

Contraindications/Cautions:
Back injury: Do this pose with bent knees, or perform Ardha Uttanasana
(pronounced ARE-dah, ardha= half), with your hands on the wall, legs perpendicular to your torso, and arms parallel to the floor.

Step By Step:
1. Stand in Tadasana, hands on hips (feet together or hip-width distance apart). Lift the arches of the feet, and hug the leg muscles to the bones. Internally rotate the thighs and press them back into space. Draw the lower belly in and up. Inhale, lift heart. Exhale, tip the pelvic bowl forward, maintaining the lift to the heart, as you lower the torso down toward the thighs. (As you descend, draw the front torso out of the groins and lengthen the space between the pubis (low belly) and sternum (breast bone). As in all the forward bends, the emphasis is on lengthening the front torso as you move more fully into the position).

2. Bring the finger tips to the floor slightly in front of or beside your feet, (bend the knees as much as you need to make this happen) Other options are to bring your palms to the backs of your ankles, or cross your forearms and hold your elbows. Press the feet firmly into the floor and lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling. Turn the top thighs slightly inward.

3. With each inhalation in the pose, lift and lengthen the front torso just slightly; with each exhalation release the torso slightly closer to the thighs. In this way the torso oscillates almost imperceptibly with the breath. Let your head hang from the root of the neck, which is deep in the upper back, in between the shoulder blades. Lift the shoulders away from the neck.
4. Stay in the pose for 5-10 breaths. Uttanasana can be used as a resting position between the standing poses. It can also be practiced as a pose in itself.

5. Bring the hands back to the hips and reestablish the length of the front torso. Draw the hamstrings down to lift the torso back to upright.

**Beginner’s Tip:** If a student cannot touch the ground, hold onto the backs of the legs wherever the hands fall (except for the knees) or cross the arms in front of the body holding onto the elbows. Let the head hang with gravity. If this is still too intense, take tension off the hamstrings and low back by bending the knees.

To increase the stretch in the backs of your legs, bend your knees slightly. Imagine that the sacrum is sinking deeper into the back of your pelvis and bring the tailbone closer to the pubis. Then against this resistance, push the top thighs back and the heels down and straighten the knees again. Be careful not to straighten the knees by locking them back (you can press your hands against the back of each knee to provide some resistance); instead let them straighten as the two ends of each leg move farther apart.

**Modifications and Props:** As you come forward, take the hands to a block. Use the block to help you find length, also for stability.

**Deepen The Pose:** To increase the stretch in the backs of your legs, lean slightly forward and lift up onto the balls of your feet, pulling your heels a half-inch or so away from the floor. Draw your inner groins deep into the pelvis, and then, from the height of the groins, lengthen your heels back onto the floor.

**Variations:**

_Ardha Uttanasana: Half Forward Bend_

**Also:** See Padahastasana & Padangusthasana

**Partnering/Assists:** A partner can help you encourage the backs of your legs to open. Perform Uttanasana, resting your buttocks against a wall with your heels 6 to 12 inches away from the wall. Bend your knees. Have your partner press firmly against your sacrum. Imagine that the sacrum is sinking into your pelvis and lengthening through the tailbone, which in turn is growing up the wall. Slowly straighten your knees against this resistance. Don’t simply lock the knees back to straighten them; instead, resist the back knees slightly forward as the heads of the thigh bones press back.

**Misalignments:**

Watch for students leaning back into the hamstrings. Legs should be perpendicular
(90°) to the floor with the weight slightly more into the toes.

**Teaching Tip:**
If a student is having difficulty folding deeply into this pose, massage the lower back on both sides, a few inches away from the spine.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Padangusthasana (Big Toe Pose)
- Padahastasana (Foot to Hand Forward Bend)
- Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Forward Bend)

**NOTES:**
BACK BENDS

KEY POINTS:

1. Scoop the tailbone forward to the pubis

2. Engage and lift the low belly (pubis to navel)

3. Big lift to the top chest/ Radiate out and up from the heart (Scoop the tip of the shoulder blades to the body and up toward the collarbone to support the lifting of the chest)

4. Internally rotate the thighs

5. Counter-rotate the arms

6. Lengthen through the back of the neck
   (If taking the head back: Lengthen the head back from the root of the neck/space between the shoulder blades)
Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)

(boo-jang-GAHS-anna)

bhujanga = serpent, snake

This posture promotes flexibility in the spine and encourages the chest to open.

Type of Pose: Back Bend (Prone)

Benefits:
• Strengthens the spine
• Stretches chest and lungs, shoulders, and abdomen
• Firms the buttocks
• Stimulates abdominal organs
• Helps relieve stress and fatigue
• Opens the heart and lungs
• Soothes sciatica
• Therapeutic for asthma
• Traditional texts say that Bhujangasana increases body heat, destroys disease, and awakens kundalini.

Contraindications/Cautions:
• Back injury
• Carpal tunnel syndrome
• Headache
• Pregnancy

Step by Step:
1. Lie prone on the floor (on your abdomen), with your forehead on the floor with your legs stretched back. Bring your hands underneath your shoulders, arms bent and fingers facing forward and spread wide. Roll the shoulder blades down the back, lightly lifting the shoulders off the floor and creating space around your neck. Draw the elbows back toward your heels and then hug them close into the body. (It will feel like you are pushing the elbows back with your hands).

2. Root the pubic bone to the floor, stretch the toes straight back so that the muscles of the legs engage (just the knees should rise slightly off the floor). Internally rotate the legs, lift the backs of the thighs toward the ceiling and then press the tailbone down to the pubis. Lightly press down through the tops of the feet as you lift the low belly (pubis to navel). Inhale, lift the shoulders and chest up off the floor to a comfortable height. Send the heart forward through the gate of the arms. Use the strength of the back muscles to lift. (Lift the hands off the floor for a moment to become aware of the muscles in the back that initiate the lift).

3. Keep the low back neutral (pubic bone grounded) and the buttocks soft. Lift and open the chest fully. Lengthen the back of the neck, as if it were an extension of the spine (the chin will drop slightly). Roll the shoulder blades down the back and distribute the backbend evenly throughout the entire spine.

4. Lift and lower several times, activating the back muscles as you lift, and softening
them as you lower. Lengthen as you lift, moving the torso forward (through the gate of the arms) and up. Some students may have the ability to rise up slightly higher than others, pressing down through the hands and straightening the arms. However, there is high potential here to jam the low back, if you do not have the necessary strength and flexibility. For most of us, it is safest to practice with the bent arms, and with a light lift to the torso. Lift only to the height where you can still maintain the connection of the pubic bone to the floor.

5. Find a place of softness in the pose and allow the mind to be absorbed in the energy of the heart. As the sensations in the pose expand, create space in the heart to hold them, breathing, sensing and feeling into the heart. Exhale to come down, releasing the forehead to the earth.

Beginner’s Tip:

Don’t overdo the backbend. To find the height at which you can work comfortably and avoid straining your back, take your hands off the floor for a moment, so that the height you find will be through extension.

Clenching the buttocks will aggravate the low back. You may keep the buttocks firm but do not clench.

Modifications:

Sphinx Pose is a beginning variation and a gentler backbend for beginners.

Props:

If you are very stiff, it might be better to avoid doing this pose on the floor. Brace a metal folding chair against a wall, and do the pose with your hands on the front edge of the seat, balls of the feet on the floor.

Deepen The Pose:

If you have the flexibility in the armpits, chest, and groins you can move into a deeper backbend. Walk the hands a little farther forward and straighten your elbows, turning the upper arms outward. Lift the top of the sternum straight toward the ceiling.

Partnering:

Your partner can help you learn about the correct action of the pelvis in a backbend. Once in the pose, have your partner straddle your legs. He/she should bend over and grip the sides of your pelvis, thumbs toward the sacrum, then spread the back of your pelvis, encourage your outer hips to soften, and push your hip points toward each other.

Preparatory Poses:

• Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)
• Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog Pose)

Follow Up Poses:

• Back Bends

NOTES:
Bitilasana (Cow Pose)

**Type of Pose:** Back bend

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the front torso and neck
- Provides a gentle massage to the spine and belly organs

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
With a neck injury, keep the head in line with the torso.

**Step by Step:**
1. Start on your hands and knees in a "tabletop" position. Make sure your knees are set directly below your hips and your wrists, elbows and shoulders are in line and perpendicular to the floor. Center your head in a neutral position, eyes looking at the floor.

2. As you inhale, lift your sitting bones and chest toward the ceiling, allowing your belly to sink toward the floor. Lengthen through the tailbone and lift your head to look straight ahead.

3. Exhale, coming back to neutral "tabletop" position on your hands and knees. Repeat 10 to 20 times.

4. This pose is often paired with Cat Pose on the exhale for a gentle, flowing vinyasa.

**Follow Up Pose:**
- Cat Pose
Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)

This pose is so called because it looks like an archer’s bow, the torso and legs representing the body of the bow, and the arms the string.

(don-your-AHS-anna)
dhanu = bow

Type of Pose: Back bend, Chest Opener

Benefits:
- Stretches the entire front of the body, ankles, thighs and groins, abdomen and chest, and throat, and deep hip flexors (psoas)
- Strengthens the back muscles
- Improves posture
- Stimulates the organs of the abdomen and neck

Contraindications and Cautions:
- High or low blood pressure
- Migraine
- Insomnia
- Serious lower-back or neck injury

Step by Step:
1. Lie on your belly with your hands alongside your torso, palms up. (You can lie on a folded blanket to pad the front of your torso and legs.) Exhale and bend your knees, bringing your heels as close as you can to your buttocks. Reach back with your hands and take hold of your ankles (but not the tops of the feet). Make sure your knees aren’t wider than the width of your hips, and keep your knees hip width for the duration of the pose.

2. Inhale and strongly lift your heels away from your buttocks and, at the same time, lift your thighs away from the floor. This will have the effect of pulling your upper torso and head off the floor. Burrow the tailbone down toward the floor, and keep your back muscles soft. As you continue lifting the heels and thighs higher, press your shoulder blades firmly against your back to open your heart. Draw the tops of the shoulders away from your ears. (Externally rotate the upper arms to open the chest and internally rotate the lower arms). Gaze forward.

3. With the belly pressed against the floor, breathing will be difficult. Breathe more into the back of your torso, and be sure not to stop breathing.

4. Stay in this pose anywhere from 20 to 30 seconds. Release as you exhale, and lie quietly for a few breaths. You can repeat the pose once or twice more.

Therapeutic Applications:
- Constipation
- Respiratory ailments
- Mild backache
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Menstrual discomfort
Beginner’s Tip:
Sometimes beginners find it difficult to lift their thighs away from the floor. You can give your legs a little upward boost by lying with your thighs supported on a rolled-up blanket.

Variations:
A variation of Dhanurasana is called Parsva (parsva = side, flank) Dhanurasana. Perform Dhanurasana according to the instructions in the main description above. Then with an exhalation, dip your right shoulder toward the floor, strongly tug your left foot to the right, and roll over onto your right side. Students often have a difficult time rolling over for the first few times they make the attempt. Don’t despair. You can practice rolling onto your side without holding your ankles. Just bend your knees and use your hands to help you get a feel for the rolling movement. Stay on your right side for 20 to 30 seconds, then, as you exhale, roll across your belly and over to the left. Stay here the same length of time, and finally roll back onto your belly with an exhalation. Parsva Dhanurasana gives a good massage to your abdominal organs.

Modifications and Props:
If it isn’t possible for you to hold your ankles directly, wrap a strap around the fronts of your ankles and hold the free ends of the strap, keeping your arms fully extended.

Deepen the Pose:
You can increase the challenge of Dhanurasana by performing the pose with your thighs, calves, and inner feet touching.

Partnering:
A partner can help you work on a preparation for Dhanurasana. Perform step 1 in the description above. Have your partner kneel on the floor behind you, with his inner knees bracing your outer knees. Inhale and lift your upper torso off the floor by pulling your heels away from your buttocks, but keep your thighs on the floor. Your partner should then take hold of the backs of your ankles. Hang your torso from your partner’s support, but be sure that he doesn’t pull you any deeper into the pose. When you’re ready for more, lift yourself up. Your partner’s presence is merely to support whatever lift you create on your own.

Preparatory Poses:
- Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
- Salabhasana (Locust Pose)
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)
- Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero’s Pose)
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog Pose)
- Virasana (Hero’s Pose)

Follow-up Poses:
- Matsyasana (Fish Pose)
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)
- Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose, Backbend, or Wheel)
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog Pose)
- Ustrasana (Camel Pose)

NOTES:
Eka Pada Rajakapotasana
(One-Legged King Pigeon Pose)

The full pose, which is suitable for intermediate students, will be described in the Full Pose section below. First we’ll practice the leg position only, which should be accessible to most experienced beginners.

(aa-KAH pah-DAH rah-JAH-cop-poh-TAHS-anna)
\( eka = \) one, \( pada = \) foot or leg, \( raja = \) king
\( kapota = \) pigeon or dove

Type of Pose: Back Bend

Benefits:
- Stretches the thighs, groins and psoas, abdomen, chest and shoulders, and neck
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Opens the shoulders and chest

Contraindications and Cautions:
- Sacroiliac injury
- Ankle injury
- Knee injury
- Tight hips or thighs

Step by Step:
1. Begin on all fours, with your knees directly below your hips, and your hands slightly ahead of your shoulders. Slide your right knee forward to the back of your right wrist; at the same time angle your right shin under your torso and bring your right foot to the front of your left knee. The outside of your right shin will now rest on the floor. Slowly slide your left leg back, straightening the knee and descending the front of the thigh to the floor. Lower the outside of your right buttock to the floor. Position the right heel just in front of the left hip.

2. The right knee can angle slightly to the right, outside the line of the hip. Look back at your left leg. It should extend straight out of the hip (and not be angled off to the left), and rotated slightly inwardly, so its midline presses against the floor. Exhale and lay your torso down on the inner right thigh for a few breaths. Stretch your arms forward.

3. Then slide your hands back toward the front shin and push your fingertips firmly to the floor. Lift your torso away from the thigh. Lengthen the lower back by scooping the tailbone forward; at the same time, lift your pubis toward the navel. Roll your left hip point toward the right heel, and lengthen the left front groin.

4. If you can maintain the upright position of your pelvis without the support of your hands on the floor, bring your hands to the top rim of your pelvis. Push heavily down. Against this pressure,
lift the lower rim of your rib cage. The back ribs should lift a little faster than the front. Without shortening the back of your neck, drop your head back. To lift your chest, push the top of your sternum (at the manubrium) straight up toward the ceiling.

5. Stay in this position for a minute. Then, with your hands back on the floor, carefully slide the left knee forward, then exhale and lift up and back into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose). Take a few breaths, release the knees to all-fours on another exhalation, and repeat with the legs reversed for the same length of time.

Beginner’s Tip:
At first many students who learn this pose aren’t able to easily grasp the back foot directly with their hands. Take a strap with a buckle. Slip a small loop over the back foot—let’s say the left foot is extended back—and tighten the strap around the ball of the foot. Make sure the buckle is against the sole of the foot. Perform the leg position, and lay the strap on the floor along side the left leg. Bend the left knee and grasp the strap with the left hand. Swing that arm up and over your head, then reach back with the right hand. Hold the strap in both hands, and carefully walk your hands down the strap toward the foot.

Deepen The Pose:
Your partner can help with the lift of the arms. Perform the pose to your capacity, whether your hands are grasping the foot or a strap. Have your partner stand behind you. He should press his hands against your outer upper arms, just above the shoulder, and lift the outer arms toward the elbows. Release your side ribs down, away from the arms. Keep the tops of your shoulders soft. The full pose, which is suitable for intermediate students, will be described in the Full Pose section below. First we’ll practice the leg position only, which should be accessible to most experienced beginners.

Partnering:
Your partner can help with the lift of the arms. Perform the pose to your capacity, whether your hands are grasping the foot or a strap. Have your partner stand behind you. He should press his hands against your outer upper arms, just above the shoulder, and lift the outer arms toward the elbows. Release your side ribs down, away from the arms. Keep the tops of your shoulders soft. The full pose, which is suitable for intermediate students, will be described in the Full Pose section below. First we’ll practice the leg position only, which should be accessible to most experienced beginners.

Full Pose:
For the full pose, first perform the preliminary leg position. Then with your hands braced on the floor, bend the back knee and bring the foot as close to the top of your head as possible. Inhale, stretch the right arm upward; then exhale, bend the elbow, and reach back and grasp the inside of the left foot. After a few breaths, reach back with the left hand and grasp the outside of the foot. Draw the sole of the foot as close as possible to the crown of your head. Hold this position for 30 seconds. Then release the foot, lower the
leg, perform step 5 to change the position of the legs and repeat on the second side for the same length of time.

**Variations:**
Eka Pada Rajakapotasana is actually the first in a series of four, increasingly difficult Pigeon poses. In each of the three successive poses, the forward leg is placed in a slightly different position. In the second variation the forward foot is standing on the floor just in front of the same-side buttock, with the knee angled well forward of the heel. In the third variation the forward leg is in Ardha Virasana, while in the fourth the leg is stretched straight forward (as in Hanumanasana or Monkey Pose) of the pelvis.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Baddha Konasana
- Bhujangasana
- Gomukhasana
- Setu Bandha
- Supta Virasana
- Supta Baddha Konasana
- Utthita Parsvakonasana
- Utthita Trikonasana
- Virasana
- Vrksasana

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Down Dog
- Floor Postures

**NOTES:**

Matsyasana  
(Fish Pose)

Traditionally Fish Pose is performed with the legs in Padmasana (Lotus). Since Padmasana is beyond the capacity of most beginning students, here we’ll work either with the knees bent, feet on the floor, or with the legs straight pressed against the floor.

(mot-see-AHS-anna)  
matsya = fish

Type of Pose: Rejuvenating Back Bend

Benefits:
• A traditional text that Matsyasana is the “destroyer of all diseases.”
• Stretches the deep hip flexors (psoas) and the muscles (intercostals) between the ribs
• Stretches and stimulates the muscles of the belly and front of the neck
• Stretches and stimulates the organs of the belly and throat
• Strengthens the muscles of the upper back and back of the neck
• Improves posture

Contraindications and Cautions:
• High or low blood pressure
• Migraine
• Insomnia
• Serious lower-back or neck injury

Step by Step:
1. Lie on your back on the floor with your knees bent, feet on the floor. Inhale, lift your pelvis slightly off the floor, and slide your hands, palms down, below your buttocks. Then rest your buttocks on the backs of your hands (and don’t lift them off your hands as you perform this pose). Be sure to tuck your forearms and elbows up close to the sides of your torso. Extend the legs and reach out through the big toe mounds.

2. On an inhalation, bend the elbows, press the forearms against the floor and lift the chest. Gaze forward at the feet. Exhale, press your scapulas into your back and, slowly touch the head back onto the floor. Depending on how high you arch your back and lift your chest, either the back of your head or its crown will rest on the floor. There should be a minimal amount of weight on your head to avoid crunching your neck. (For more about this, see the Beginners Tip below.)

3. You can keep your knees bent or straighten your legs out onto the floor. If you do the latter, keep your thighs active, and internally rotating.

4. Stay for 15 to 30 seconds, breathing smoothly. To come out: Inhale, lift the chest. Exhale, glide the back of the head
through to the floor. Draw your thighs up into your belly and squeeze.

**Beginner’s Tip:** Beginners sometimes strain their neck in this pose. If you feel any discomfort in your neck or throat, either lower your chest slightly toward the floor, or put a thickly folded blanket under the back of your head.

**Modifications and Props:**
The back bending position in Matsyasana can be difficult for beginning students. Perform the pose with your back supported on a thickly rolled blanket. Be sure your head rests comfortably on the floor and your throat is soft.

**Deepen The Pose:**
To increase the challenge in this pose, slide your hands out from underneath your buttocks and bring them into Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal) with arms outstretched and fingertips pointing toward the ceiling.

**Variations:**
As mentioned above this pose is typically performed with the legs in Padmasana, a position that’s beyond the capacity of even many experienced students. Here’s a challenging variation of the pose as described above. Perform the pose with the legs straightened on the floor, as described in step 3 above. Then with an exhalation lift the legs off the floor to an angle of 45 degrees relative to the floor. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds, pressing actively through the heels. Finally lower the legs to the floor with an exhalation, and lay the torso and head on the floor.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you get a feel for the movement of the scapulas in this pose. Perform the pose. Have your partner stand straddling your pelvis. She should then lean over and spread her palms on your scapulas, pressing them firmly against your back. But be sure that she doesn’t pull you any deeper into the back bend; she should only support the scapulas against the back torso.

**Preparatory Poses:**
While Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand) isn’t exactly a preparatory pose, Matsyasana is often sequenced as a counter-pose after Shoulderstand. Other preparations for this pose might include:
- Baddha Konasana
- Bhujangasana
- Dhanurasana
- Salabhasana
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana
- Supta Virasana
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- Virasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Gomukhasana
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana
- Supta Virasana
- Ustrasana
- Virasana

**NOTES:**
Natarajasana
(Lord of the Dance Pose)

Also called the Cosmic Dancer, Nataraja is another name for Shiva. His dance symbolizes cosmic energy in its "five actions:" creation, maintenance, and destruction or re-absorption of the world, concealment of authentic being, and grace.

We’ll start with a modified version of the pose. The full pose will be described in the Variation section below.

(not-ah-raj-AHS-anna)

nata = actor, dancer, mime, raja = king

Type of Pose: Back Bend, Balance Pose

Benefits:
- Stretches the shoulders and chest
- Stretches the thighs, groins, and abdomen
- Strengthens the legs and ankles
- Improves balance

Contraindications and Cautions: lower back injuries.

Step by Step:
1. Stand in Tadasana (Mountain Pose). Inhale, shift your weight onto your right foot, and lift your left heel toward your left buttock as you bend the knee. Press the head of your right thigh bone back, deep into the hip joint, and pull the knee cap up to keep the standing leg straight and strong.

2. There are two variations you might try here with your arms and hands. In either case, try to keep your torso relatively upright. The first is to reach back with your left hand and grasp the outside of your left foot or ankle. To avoid compression in your lower back, actively lift your pubis toward your navel, and at the same time, draw your tailbone toward the floor.

3. Begin to lift your left foot up, away from the floor, and press it back into the hand, away from your torso. Extend the left thigh behind you and parallel to the floor. Stretch your right arm forward, in front of your torso, parallel to the floor.

4. The second option with the hands is to sweep your right hand around behind your back and catch hold of the inner left foot. Then sweep the left hand back and grab the outside of the left foot. This variation will challenge your balance even more. Then raise the thigh as described in step 3. This second variation will increase the lift of your chest and the stretch of your shoulders.
5. Stay in the pose for 20 to 30 seconds. Then release the grasp on the foot, place the left foot back onto the floor, and repeat for the same length of time on the other side.

**Deepen the Pose:**
Perform step 1 as described above. Then turn your left arm actively outward (so the palm faces away from the side of the torso), bend the elbow, and grip the outside of the left foot. (You can also grab the big toe with the first two fingers and the thumb.) The fingers will cross the top of the foot, the thumb will press against the sole. Inhale, lift the left leg up, and bring the thigh parallel to the floor. As you do this, rotate the left shoulder in such a way that the bent elbow swings around and up, so that it points toward the ceiling. It requires extreme flexibility to externally rotate and flex the shoulder joint in this way. Reach the right arm straight forward, in front of the torso and parallel to the floor. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, release, and repeat on the second side for the same length of time.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
Many beginners, when lifting the leg, tend to cramp in the back of the thigh. Be sure to keep the ankle of the raised foot flexed; that is, draw the top of the foot toward the shin.

**Modifications and Props:**
Balance can be difficult in the modified version. Try bracing the free hand against a wall to help you stay stable.

**Partnering:**
Have your partner help you with balance. As you perform the pose (any of the described variations), have your partner stand behind you. Let him use his best judgment on how to keep you from toppling over, such as bracing your hips with his hands, or helping you to grasp the raised foot.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Dhanurasana
- Eka Pada Rajakapotasana
- Gomukhasana
- Hanumanasana
- Supta Virasana
- Supta Padangusthasana
- Urdhva Dhanurasana
- Ustrasana
- Uttanasana
- Virabhadrasana I, III
- Virasana
- Vrksasana

**Follow-up Poses:**
Natarajasana is usually performed as the final pose of a series of challenging backbends. You’ll probably want to release the spine by coming to Ardha Uttanasana (Half Uttanasana), also known as Right Angle Pose, at the wall or reclining twist.

**NOTES:**
Salabhasana (Locust Pose)

Grouped among the so-called “baby back bends,” which includes Dhanurasana (Bow Pose) and Sea Monster Pose (described in the Variations section below), it is an unassuming pose that, like other seemingly simple poses, is actually a lot more interesting and challenging than it appears at first glance.

(sha-la-BAHS-anna) salabha = grasshopper, locust

**Type of Pose:** Baby Back Bend

**Benefits:**
- Strengthens the muscles of the spine, buttocks, and backs of the arms and legs
- Stretches the shoulders, chest, belly, and thighs
- Improves posture
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Helps relieve stress

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
- Headache
- Serious back injury
- Students with neck injuries should keep their head in a neutral position by looking down at the floor; they might also support the forehead on a thickly folded blanket.

**Step by Step:**

1. For this pose you might want to pad the floor below your pelvis and ribs with a folded blanket. Lie on your belly with your arms along the sides of your torso, palms up, forehead resting on the floor.

2. Inhaling, expand the belly into the floor as you lift the head, torso, arms, and legs slightly up off the floor and then extend. Lengthen the heart forward and the heels back. The emphasis is on lengthening rather than lifting. You’ll be resting on your lower ribs, belly, and front pelvis. Firm your buttocks and reach strongly through your legs, first through the heels to lengthen the back legs, then through the bases of the big toes. Keep the big toes turned toward each other.

3. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and stretch back actively through your fingertips. Imagine there’s a weight pressing down on the backs of the upper arms, and push up toward the ceiling against this resistance. Press your scapulas firmly into your back.

4. Gaze forward or slightly upward, being careful not to jut your chin forward and crunch the back of your neck. Keep the base of the skull lifted and the back of the neck long.

5. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then release with an exhalation. Take a few
breaths and repeat 1 or 2 times more if you like

**Beginner’s Tip:** Beginners sometimes have difficulty sustaining the lift of the torso and legs in this pose. Begin the pose with your hands resting on the floor, a little bit back from the shoulders, closer to your waist. Inhale and gently push your hands against the floor to help lift the upper torso. Then keep the hands in place as you do the pose, or after a few breaths, once you’ve established the lift of the chest, swing them back into the position described above in step 3. As for the legs, you can do the pose with the legs lifted alternately off the floor. For example, if you want to hold the pose for a total of 1 minute, first lift the right leg off the floor for 30 seconds, then the left leg for 30 seconds.

**Variations:** A challenging variation of Salabhasana is called Makarasana (mah-KAH-rah = often translated as "crocodile" or "dolphin," but literally "sea monster"). The legs are raised in this pose exactly as in Salabhasana, but the fingers are clasped and then the palms are pressed against the back of the head, with the index fingers hooked up underneath the base of the skull. With the upper torso lifted, open the arms out to your sides.

**Modifications and Props:** Beginners sometimes have difficulty holding this pose. You can support the area around your lower sternum with a rolled-up blanket to help maintain the lift of your upper torso. Similarly you can support the front of your thighs with a blanket roll to help support the lift of your legs.

**Partnering:** A partner can help you get a feel for the work in the back of the upper arms. Have your partner stand straddling your torso while you perform the pose. He should then lean forward and press his hands firmly against the backs of your upper arms (triceps). You then push up against this resistance. The partner might also, as he’s pressing down on the upper arms, draw the skin away from the shoulders, toward your wrists.

**Prep Poses:**
- Bhujangasana
- Gomukhasana
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana
- Supta Virasana
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- Virabhadrasana I
- Virasana

**Follow-up Poses:** Salabhasana is a good preparation for all of the “baby” back bends, including Dhanurasana and Ustrasana. Other possible follow-ups include:
- Bharadvajasana
- Salamba Sarvangasana
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana

**Deepen the Pose:** Advanced students can challenge themselves a bit more with a variation of Salabhasana. Instead of stretching the legs straight back from the pelvis, bend the knees and position the shins perpendicular to the floor. Then, as you lift the upper torso, head and arms, lift the knees as far away from the floor as possible.

**NOTES:**
Setu Bandhasana
(Bridge Pose)

(SE-toh BAHN-dah)
setu = dam, dike, or bridge
bandha = lock

Type of Pose: Back Bend, Inversion

Benefits:
- Stretches the chest, neck, and spine
- Calms the brain and helps alleviate stress and mild depression
- Stimulates abdominal organs, lungs, and thyroid
- Rejuvenates tired legs
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Relieves menstrual discomfort when done supported
- Reduces anxiety, fatigue, backache, headache, and insomnia
- Therapeutic for asthma, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, and sinusitis

Contraindications/Cautions:
Neck injury: avoid this pose unless you are practicing under the supervision

Step by Step:
1. Lie supine on the floor, and if necessary, place a thickly folded blanket under your shoulders to protect your neck. Bend your knees and place the feet on the floor, hip-bone distance apart and about 6 inches in front of the buttocks (about a palms distance from the buttocks).

2. Walk the right shoulder up an inch. Walk the left shoulder up an inch. Roll both shoulder blades slightly in toward the spine, so that the weight of your back rests on the upper arms. Scoop the tailbone up toward the knees, press the inner feet down into the earth and lift he hips to the ceiling. Keep the thighs and feet parallel, and squeeze the inner thighs together as if there is a ball between the legs. Lightly firm (but don’t harden) the buttocks, keep lifting with the pelvis.

3. One at a time, roll each shoulder blade in toward the spine, and either extend the arms underneath you, palms face down, or clasp the hands below your pelvis, extending the arms toward the heels, keeping the arms and hands on the floor. Keep the weight of the torso suspended between the feet and the upper arms.

4. Lift your buttocks until the thighs are about parallel to the floor, with your knees directly above the heels. Extend the knees forward (away from the hips). Lengthen the tailbone toward the backs of the knees and lift the low belly (pubis toward the navel).

5. Lift your chin slightly away from the sternum and, firming the shoulder blades...
against your back, press the top of the sternum toward the chin. Firm the outer arms, broaden the shoulder blades, and try to lift the space between them at the base of the neck (where it’s resting on the blanket) up into the torso.

6. Stay in the pose anywhere from 30 seconds to 1 minute. Release with an exhalation, rolling the spine slowly down onto the floor.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
Once the shoulders are rolled under, be sure not to pull them forcefully down away from your ears, which tends to overstretch the neck. Instead, lift the tops of the shoulders slightly toward the ears and push the inner shoulder blades away from the spine.

**Variations:**
**Eka Pada Setu Bandha Sarvangasana**
(pronounced ACHE-ah PAH-dah, *eka* = one, *pada* = foot or leg)

On an exhalation, lift the right knee into your torso, then inhale and extend the leg perpendicular to the floor. Hold for 30 seconds, then release the foot to the floor again with an exhalation. Secure the foot again and repeat with the left leg for the same length of time.

**Modifications and Props:**
If you have difficulty supporting the lift of the pelvis in this pose after taking it away from the floor, slide a block or bolster under your sacrum and rest the pelvis on this support. This also makes for a nice restorative version. If you are having difficulty keeping the thighs together, wrap a strap around the thighs to prevent the legs from splaying out, or squeeze a block between the inner thighs.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you learn about the correct action of the top thighs in a backbend. Perform the pose, then have the partner straddle your legs and clasp your top thighs. He/she can brace your outer thighs with his/her inner legs. Next the partner should strongly turn the thighs inward and encourage the inner thighs down toward the floor (as you resist the tailbone toward the pubis). Recreate this action in all backbends.

**Deepen The Pose:**
Once in the pose, lift your heels off the floor and push your tailbone up, a little closer to the pubis. Then from the lift of the tail, stretch the heels back to the floor again.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog Pose)
- Virasana (Heroe Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog Pose)
- Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose)
- Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand)

**NOTES:**
**Sphinx**

**Type of Pose:** Baby Back Bend

**Benefits:**
- Strengthens the spine
- Stretches chest and lungs, shoulders, and abdomen
- Firms the buttocks
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Helps relieve stress

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
- Back Injury
- Headache

**Step by Step:**
1. Lie on your belly, legs side by side. Firm your tailbone toward your pubis and lengthen it toward your heels. Then, rotate your thighs inwardly by rolling your outer thighs toward the floor. This helps broaden and lengthen your lower back and sacrum (the downward-facing triangular bone at the back of your pelvis) to protect it in a back bend.

2. Reach actively through your toes to the wall behind you. As you move into the pose, be sure to continue lengthening your tail toward your heels to protect your lower back. Your buttocks should be firm but not clenched. While your legs are active, your tongue, eyes and brain should be quiet.

3. Now set your elbows under your shoulders and your forearms on the floor parallel to each other. Inhale and lift your upper torso and head away from the floor into a mild back bend.

4. The final step to building a solid foundation in Sphinx Pose is to bring awareness to your lower belly, the area just above the pubic bone and below the navel. Lightly draw it away from the floor to create a dome that rounds up toward your lower back. This is very subtle—no sucking in, hardening, or rigidity required. This belly lift supports and distributes the curvature of your backbend more evenly along the length of the spine, soothing your lower back and awakening your upper back.

5. Stay for five to 10 breaths, then exhale and slowly release your belly and lower your torso and head to the floor. Turn your head to one side. Lie quietly for a while,

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Plank Pose

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Setu Bandhasana (Bridge Pose)

**NOTES:**
Urdhva Dhanurasana
(Upward Bow or Wheel Pose)

(OORD-vah don-your-AHS-anna)

*urdhva = upward*

*dhana = bow*

**Type of Pose:** Back Bend, Chest and Heart Opener

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the chest and lungs
- Strengthens the arms and wrists, legs, buttocks, abdomen, and spine
- Stimulates the thyroid and pituitary
- Increases energy and counteracts depression
- Therapeutic for asthma, back pain, infertility, and osteoporosis

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
- Back injury
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Heart problems
- High or low blood pressure

**Step by Step:**
1. Lie supine on the floor. Bend your knees and set the soles of your feet on the floor, heels as close to the sitting bones as possible. Bend your elbows and spread your palms on the floor beside your head, forearms relatively perpendicular to the floor, fingers pointing toward your shoulders.

2. Pressing your inner feet actively into the floor, exhale and push your tailbone up toward the pubis, firming (but not hardening) the buttocks, and lift the buttocks off the floor. Keep your thighs and inner feet parallel. Take 2 or 3 breaths. Then firmly press the inner hands into the floor and your shoulder blades against the back and lift up onto the crown of your head. Keep your arms parallel. Take 2 or 3 breaths.

3. Press your feet and hands into the floor, tailbone and shoulder blades against your back, and with an exhalation, lift your head off the floor and straighten your arms. Turn the upper thighs slightly inward and firm the outer thighs. Narrow the hip points and lengthen the tailbone toward the backs of the knees, lifting the pubis toward the navel.

4. Turn the upper arms outward but keep the weight on the bases of the index fingers. Spread the shoulder blades across the back and let the head hang, or lift it slightly to look down at the floor.

5. Stay in the pose anywhere from 5 to 10 seconds or more, breathing easily. Repeat anywhere from 3 to 10 times.
Beginner’s Tip:

The knees and feet tend to splay as you lift into this pose, which compresses the lower back. In the beginning position, loop and secure a strap around your thighs, just above the knees, to hold the thighs at hip width and parallel to each other. To keep the feet from turning out, place a block between them, with the bases of the big toes pressing the ends of the block. As you go up, press the feet into the block.

There is also a tendency for the elbows to splay out. Keep them drawing in toward each other.

Variations:

Eka Pada Urdhva Dhanurasana
(pronounced ACHE-ah POD-ah, eka = one, pada = foot or leg)

Perform Urdhva Dhanurasana. Shift your weight onto the left foot and, with an exhalation, bend your right knee and draw it into your torso. Then inhale and extend the right leg at about a 45 degree angle relative to the floor. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds, exhale, bend the knee and return the foot to the floor. Repeat with the left leg for the same length of time.

Modifications and Props:

Often the armpits and/or groins are tight and restrict full movement into this pose. You can support either your hands or feet on a pair of blocks to help yourself realize the full backbend. Be sure to brace the blocks against a wall, and if you like, cover them with a sticky mat to keep the hands or feet from slipping.

Partnering:

A partner can help you learn about the work in the shoulders in this pose. Have your partner stand at your head, facing you. Perform the pose. Your partner can bring his/her hands around the sides of your torso so that his/her palms cover the shoulder blades and encourage them to widen away from the spine.

Deepen The Pose:

Once in the pose, lift your heels away from the floor and press your tailbone toward the ceiling. Walk the feet a little closer to the hands. Then, from the height of the tailbone, press the heels into the floor again. This will increase the depth of the backbend.

Preparatory Poses:

• Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
• Setu Bandasana (Bridge Pose)
• Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Up Dog)
• Virasana (Hero’s Pose)
• Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)

Follow-Up Poses:

• Gentle twists like Bharadvajasana
• Supta Padangusthasana

NOTES:
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
(Upward-Facing Dog Pose)

(ERD-vah MOO-kah shvon-AHS-anna)
urdhva = upward  mukha = face
svana = dog

Type of Pose: Back Bend

Benefits:
• Improves posture
• Strengthens the spine, arms, wrists
• Stretches chest and lungs, shoulders, and abdomen
• Firms the buttocks
• Stimulates abdominal organs
• Helps relieve mild depression, fatigue, and sciatica
• Therapeutic for asthma

Contraindications/Cautions:
• Back injury
• Carpal tunnel syndrome
• Headache
• Pregnancy

Step by Step:
1. Lie prone on the floor. Stretch your legs back, with the tops of your feet on the floor. Bend your elbows and spread your palms on the floor beside your waist so that your forearms are relatively perpendicular to the floor.

2. Inhale and press your inner hands firmly into the floor and slightly back, as if you were trying to pull yourself forward along the floor. Then straighten your arms and simultaneously lift your torso up and your hips and legs a few inches off the floor on an inhalation. (Maintain a micro-

bend to the elbows to help assist the opening of the shoulders and chest). Keep the thighs firm and slightly turned inward, the arms firm and turned out so the elbow creases face forward.

3. Press the tailbone toward the pubis and lift the low belly (pubis toward the navel). Narrow the hip points. Firm but don’t harden the buttocks.

4. Hug the shoulder blades on to the back and puff the side ribs forward. Lift through the top of the sternum but avoid pushing the front ribs forward, which only hardens the lower back. Look straight ahead or tip the head back slightly, but take care not to compress the back of the neck and harden the throat.

5. Urdhva Mukha Svanasana is one of the positions in the traditional Sun Salutation sequence. You can also practice this pose individually, holding it anywhere from 15 to 30 seconds, breathing easily. Release down to the floor or lift from the core into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down-Dog) with an exhalation.

Beginner’s Tip:
There’s a tendency in this pose to "hang" on the shoulders, which lifts them up toward the ears and "turtles" the neck.
Actively draw the shoulders away from the ears by lengthening down along the back armpits, pulling the shoulder blades toward the tailbone, and puffing the side ribs forward. If you need help learning this, lift each hand on a block.

**Modifications and Props:**
Often it’s difficult to keep the legs strongly suspended above the floor. Before you move into the pose, position a thick blanket roll below your top thighs. When you are in the pose, lightly rest your thighs on this roll as you press the tailbone closer to the roll.

**See Cobra Pose for a modification of Up Dog.**

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you learn about the lift of the chest in this pose. Come into position with a strap looped around your back torso (across the shoulder blades) and under the armpits. Have your partner sit in front of you, a foot or so away, and grip and pull the ends of the strap, while at the same time pressing his/her feet lightly against the fronts of your shoulders. Release the heads of the upper arm bones away from this pressure as you dig the shoulder blades into the back, away from the strap.

**Deepen The Pose:**
To increase the strength and lightness of this pose, push from the backs of your knees along the calves and out through the heels. The tops of your feet will press more firmly against the floor; as they do, lift the top sternum up and forward.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Back bends
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana will help you learn to lift the chest in poses like Tadasana (Mountain Pose) and Virasana (Hero’s Pose).

**NOTES:**
Ustrasana (Camel Pose)

(oosh-TRAHS-anna)

utra = camel

Type of Pose: Back Bend, Chest & Heart Opener

Benefits:
- Stretches the entire front of the body, the ankles, thighs and groins,
- Abdomen and chest, and throat
- Stretches the deep hip flexors (psoas)
- Strengthens back muscles
- Improves posture
- Stimulates the organs of the abdomen and neck

Contraindications and Cautions:
- High or low blood pressure
- Migraine
- Insomnia
- Serious low back or neck injury

Step by Step:
1. Kneel on the floor with your knees hip width and thighs perpendicular to the floor. Rotate your thighs inward slightly and back, as you press the tailbone forward. Press your shins and the tops of your feet firmly into floor.
2. Rest your hands on the back of your pelvis, bases of the palms (or your fists) on the tops of the buttocks, fingers pointing down. Use your hands to spread the back pelvis and lengthen it down through your tail bone. Then lightly firm the tail forward, toward the pubis. Make sure though that your front groins don’t "puff" forward. To prevent this, press your front thighs back, countering the forward action of your tail. Inhale and lift your heart by pressing the shoulder blades against your back ribs.
3. With a strong core, lean back against the firmness of the tail bone and shoulder blades. For the time being keep your head up, chin near the sternum, and your hands on the pelvis. Beginners probably won’t be able to drop straight back into this pose, touching the hands to the feet simultaneously while keeping the thighs perpendicular to the floor. If you need to, tilt the thighs back a little from the perpendicular and minimally twist to one side to get one hand on the same-side foot. Then press your thighs back to perpendicular, turn your torso back to neutral, and touch the second hand to its foot. If you’re not able to touch your feet without compressing your lower back, curl your toes under and elevate your heels.
4. See that your lower front ribs aren’t protruding sharply toward the ceiling, which hardens the belly and compresses the lower back. Release the front ribs and lift the front of the pelvis up, toward the ribs. Then lift the lower back ribs away from the pelvis to keep the lower spine as long as possible. Press your palms firmly
against your soles (or heels), with the bases of the palms on the heels and the fingers pointing toward the toes. Turn your arms outwardly so the elbow creases face forward, without squeezing the shoulder blades together. You can keep your neck in a relatively neutral position, neither flexed nor extended, or drop your head back. But be careful not to strain your neck and harden your throat.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
Beginners very often aren’t able to touch their hands to their feet without straining their back or neck. First, try to turn your toes under and elevate your heels. If this doesn’t work, the next thing to do is to rest each hand on a block. Position the blocks just outside each heel, and stand them at their highest height (usually about 9 inches). If you’re still having difficulty, get a chair. Kneel for the pose with your back to the chair, with your calves and feet below the seat and the front edge of the seat touching your buttocks. Then lean back and bring your hands to the sides of the seat or high up on the front chair legs.

**Modifications and Props:**
In the modified pose, curl the toes under and/or bring your hands to two blocks, placed on the outside of each foot.

**Deepen The Pose:**
You can increase the challenge of Ustrasana by performing the pose with your thighs, calves, and inner feet touching.

**Partnering:**
A partner can also help you work with your neck and head in this pose. Your partner should stand directly behind you as you perform Camel. Bring your head into a neutral position; that is, align your neck so it’s neither in flexion nor extension. Have your partner support the back of your head with one hand, and press his other hand on your upper back, between the shoulder blades. He should pull the base of your skull away from the back of your neck and push your shoulder blades in the opposite direction, down the back. Let your neck grow between these two actions. Then, if you feel comfortable, have your partner carefully remove his hands and, maintaining the length in the back of your neck, drop your head back.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Bhujangasana
- Dhanurasana
- Salabhasana
- Setu Bandhasana (or Follow Up)
- Supta Virasana
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- Virasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Dandasana
- Dhanurasana
- Sarvangasana
- Sirsasana
- Urdhva Dhanurasana
- Virasana

**NOTES:**
SEATED POSES

KEY POINTS:

1. Root sit bones

2. Draw sacrum in slightly

3. Lengthen front torso

4. Hug the shoulder blades onto the back

5. Lengthen back of neck
Baddha Konasana  
(Bound Angle Pose)

Bound Angle Pose, also called Cobbler’s Pose after the typical sitting position of Indian cobblers, is an excellent groin- and hip-opener.

(BAH-dah cone-AHS-anna)  
baddha = bound  
kona = angle

Type of Pose: Seated, Hip Opener

Benefits:
• Stimulates abdominal organs, ovaries and prostate gland, bladder, and kidneys  
• Stimulates the heart and improves general circulation  
• Stretches the inner thighs, groins, and knees  
• Helps relieve mild depression, anxiety, and fatigue  
• Soothes menstrual discomfort and sciatica  
• Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause  
• Therapeutic for flat feet, high blood pressure, infertility, and asthma  
• Consistent practice of this pose until late into pregnancy is said to help ease childbirth.  
• Traditional texts say that Baddha Konasana destroys disease and gets rid of fatigue.

Contraindications:
• Groin or knee injury: Only perform this pose with blanket support under the outer thighs.

Step by Step:
1. Sit upright on the sit bones (option to sit on edge of blanket to level the pelvis). Bring the soles of the feet together and then draw the heels in toward the pelvis comfortably. Wrap the index, middle finger and thumb around each big toe, and root the outer edges of your feet into the earth. If it isn’t comfortable to hold the toes, clasp each hand around the same-side ankle or shin. Another option is to interlace your hands around the feet.

2. Draw the sacrum slightly forward. Inhale, lift the chest to lengthen the front torso. Exhale, squeeze the buttocks muscles together to release the inner thighs and knees, and then press the heels together.

3. Never force your knees down. Instead, use the external rotators (by squeezing the buttocks muscles) and the assistance of gravity to release the heads of the thigh bones down toward the earth.

4. Release any activation of the hip flexors (the crease at your hips). If they won’t release, place block underneath both thighs.
5. If comfortable, place your hands behind you (fingertips pointing toward your backside) and sit up taller, drawing the pelvis closer to the heels. Another option is to press the outer edges of your feet into the floor as you open the feet like a book.

6. Stay in this pose anywhere from 1 to 5 minutes. Then inhale, guiding your knees up with your hands, and extend the legs.

**Teacher Tips:**
*Vocalize*: “If you feel any knee pain at all, you are pushing yourself too hard, ease off.”

* If a student is sinking in the low back, or excessive rounding of the back occurs, have him sit upright on a blanket’s edge. Guide him into lifting and lengthening the front torso.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
It can be difficult to lower the knees toward the floor. If your knees are very high and your back rounded, be sure to sit on a high support, even as high as a foot off the floor. Place blocks under the thighs to allow the inner groins to release.

**Variations:**
Exhale and lean your torso forward between the knees. Remember to come forward from the hip joints, not the waist. Bend your elbows and lightly press them against the inner thighs or calves (but never on the knees). If your head doesn’t rest comfortably on the floor, support it on a block or the front edge of a chair seat.

**Modifications & Props:**
If your knees are very high and your groins are tightening, place 2 blocks or folded blankets under the thighs to help the inner groins release.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you learn how to work the inner thighs in this pose. Perform Baddha Konasana. Loop a strap over each groin, with the free ends of the straps leading away from your back torso. Have your partner sit behind you and pull on the straps (perpendicular to the line of the thighs). Your partner can also press one foot lightly against the back of your pelvis at the same time. Lean slightly forward, releasing the heads of the thigh bones away from the straps.

**Deepening the Pose:**
Imagine you have two partners, each pressing inward (toward the pelvis) on a knee. From the middle of your sacrum, push out along the outer thighs against this imaginary resistance. Then push the heels firmly together from the knees.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)
- Virasana (Hero Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:** Standing poses and most seated twists and forward bends.

**NOTES:**
Dandasana (Staff Pose)  
(Dan-das-ana)

Dandasana is the starting point for all the seated forward bends and twists. It helps improve sitting posture. It is an isometric, whole body exercise without movement.

**Type of Pose:** Seated

**Benefits:**
- Improves digestion
- Tones kidneys
- Strengthens the back
- Stretches and activates the muscles of the legs
- Helps prevent sciatic pain
- Stretches the muscles of the feet

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
Practice against the wall if you have asthma, bronchitis, breathlessness, ulcers or bulimia.

**Step by Step:**
1. Sit at the center of your mat, legs extended in front of you. Lift the flesh up and out from your sit bones so that you are sitting upright on the sit bones. Place your finger tips on the floor outside the hips (if your hands don’t reach, use blocks). Lightly press the fingertips into the floor as you extend up through the spine, and descend the inner thighs to the floor.

2. Bring the big toes together and activate the legs. Engage the thighs and rotate them inward slightly, with the knee caps remaining upward. Bring the feet to a neutral position (neither pointed nor flexed, but somewhere in between). Reach out through the mounds of your feet and pull the pinky toes back toward the torso.

3. Lengthen the tailbone toward the floor and lightly lift the low belly. Press the base of the shoulder blades into the back and lift the top chest straight up toward the ceiling. (If you are slumping in the low back, elevate the hips onto a folded blanket).

4. Sit up tall, as if there is a string pulling you up from the crown of your head. Your legs should feel energized, your torso light & lifted.

5. Take the chin parallel to the floor. Relax the shoulders and neck and gaze forward. Stay in the pose for 3-5 breaths.

**Beginner’s Tips:** If the student’s back is rounded and/or hip flexibility is poor, or if there is any discomfort in the back or the backs of the legs, have them sit on a block or folded blanket. Give more or less height depending on their flexibility. This allows them to have a more erect spine and to sit up straighter. It also releases
tension from the hamstrings and hip flexors.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- All standing poses
- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- All seated forward bends and twists
- Purvottanasana (Upward Plank Pose)

**NOTES:**
Gomukhasana  
(Cow Face Pose)

(go-moo-KAHS-anna)  
go = cow  mukha = face

**Type of Pose:** Seated, Hip Opener

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the ankles, hips and thighs, shoulders, armpits and triceps, and chest

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
- Serious neck or shoulder problems

**Step by Step:**
1. Sit in Dandasana (Staff Pose), then bend your knees and put your feet on the floor. Slide your left foot under the right knee to the outside of the right hip. Then cross your right leg over the left, stacking the right knee on top of the left, and bring the right foot to the outside of the left hip. Try to bring the heels equidistant from the hips: with the right leg on top you’ll have to tug the right heel in closer to the left hip. Sit evenly on the sit bones. Bend the elbows and clasp your hands around your knees and with an inhalation, draw the knee closer in to the body as you lift and extend out of the low back. Exhale, bring the hands to the soles of the feet and lightly massage to help release tension in the hips.

2. Inhale and stretch your right arm straight out to the right, parallel to the floor. Rotate your arm inwardly, so that the thumb points first to the floor and then toward the wall behind you, with the palm facing the ceiling. This movement will roll your right shoulder slightly up and forward, and round your upper back. With a full exhalation, sweep the arm behind your torso and tuck the forearm in the hollow of your lower back, parallel to your waist, with the right elbow against the right side of your torso. Roll the shoulder back and down, then work the forearm up your back until it is parallel to your spine. The back of your hand will be between your shoulder blades. See that your right elbow doesn’t slip away from the right side of your torso.

3. Now inhale and stretch your left arm straight forward, pointing toward the opposite wall, parallel to the floor. Turn the palm up and, with another inhalation, stretch the arm straight up toward the ceiling, palm turned back. Lift actively through your left arm, then with an exhalation, bend the elbow and reach down for the right hand. If possible, hook the right and left fingers.

4. Lift the left elbow toward the ceiling and, from the back armpit, descend the right elbow toward the floor. Firm your shoulder blades against your back ribs and lift your chest. Try to keep the left arm
right beside the left side of your head.

5. Stay in this pose for 3-5 breaths. Release the arms, uncross the legs, and repeat with the arms and legs reversed for the same length of time. Remember that whichever leg is on top, the same-side arm is lower.

Beginners Tip:
Beginners often have a difficult time getting both sit bones to rest evenly on the floor, which can make it difficult for the knees to stack on top of each other evenly. When the pelvis is tilted, the spine can’t properly extend. Use a folded blanket, block or bolster to lift the sit bones off the floor and support them evenly.

Variations:
1. From the full pose, lean forward and lay the front torso down on the inner top thigh. After 20 seconds, inhale and come up.

2. In another starting variation, come to all fours (Table Top), cross the knees, spread the feet wider than hip distance, and then sit down between the legs.

Modifications and Props:
Gomukhasana is a notoriously difficult pose for tight-shouldered people, who aren’t able to hook their fingers together. The simple solution to this dilemma is to hold a strap between the hands. Begin the pose with a strap draped over the shoulder of the bottom arm. In step 2, as you swing the bottom arm behind your back, slide the forearm as high on the back torso as possible (Remember to keep the elbow close to your side), then grab the bottom end of the strap. In step 3, stretch the other arm overhead and then reach down the back for the other end of the strap. Pull with the top arm. See if you can draw the bottom arm higher onto the back. You’re trying to work the hands toward each other and eventually clasp them. Be aware too that you may be able to clasp the hands on one side, but not the other. Another way to bring the arms into position: Take both arms behind the back and clasp opposite elbows. With the right hand, pull the left elbow towards the spine. Bring the left hand in between the shoulder blades. Release the right hand. Raise the right arm, bend at the elbow and reach down to clasp the left hand. Use a strap as necessary.

Partnering/Assists:
A partner can help you increase the stretch in the back of the top arm. Have her stand behind you as you perform the pose (in this example the left arm is high). She should take her left hand on the back of your upper left arm and gently pull it back and up, as she presses her right hand forward against your left shoulder blade.

Deepen the Pose:
You can increase the stretch in this pose if you’re a little more flexible in the shoulders and armpits by moving your hands away from the back of your torso.

Preparatory Poses:
- Baddah Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Supta Baddah Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle Pose)
- Supta Padangusthasana (Reclined Big Toes Pose)
- Upavistha Konasana
• Virasana (Hero’s Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:**

• Ardha Matsyendrasana
• Marichyasana III
• Bharadvajasana
• Garudasana
• Upavistha Konasana
• Padmasana
• Paschimottanasana

**NOTES:**
**Malasana**  
*(Garland Pose)*

**Type of Pose:** Yogic Squat

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the ankles, groins and back torso
- Tones the belly

**Contraindications and Cautions:**  
Low back or knee injuries

**Step by Step:**
1. Squat with your feet as close together as possible. (Keep your heels on the floor if you can; otherwise, support them on a folded mat.)

2. Separate your thighs slightly wider than your torso. Exhaling, lean your torso forward and fit it snugly between your thighs.

3. Press your elbows against your inner knees, bringing your palms to together in **Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal)**, and resist the knees into the elbows. This will help lengthen your front torso.

4. To go further, press your inner thighs against the sides of your torso. Reach your arms forward, then swing them out to the sides and notch your shins into your armpits. Press your finger tips to the floor, or reach around the outside of your ankles and clasp your back heels.

5. Hold the position for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then inhale, straighten the knees, and stand into **Uttanasana**.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Baddha Konasana
- Upavistha Konasana
- Virasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Uttanasana
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Bhujangasana

**NOTES:**
Siddhasana  
(Accomplished Pose)

(Sid-Haas-ana)  
Siddha = perfect (also a perfected being) or power

**Type of Pose:** Seated, Meditation

**Benefits:**
- Siddhasana directs the energy from the lower psychic centers upward through the spine, stimulating the brain and calming the entire nervous system.
- Redirects blood circulation to the lower spine and abdomen, toning the lumbar region of the spine, the pelvis and the abdominal organs, and balancing the reproductive system and blood pressure.
- Stabilizes and sublimes sexual energy because of the position of the feet with respect to the genitals.

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
- Siddhasana should not be practiced by those with sciatica.
- For men who are interested in maintaining sexual relations (i.e. with no long term commitment to celibacy), use a soft sitting support to lift the genitals high enough so that the base of the penis is not compressed. Take care to situate the heels perfectly in the midline.

**Step by Step:**
1. From Dandasana, spread your legs slightly. Bend the left knee and slide the left heel into the groin. Then release the left knee onto the floor, rotating from the hip joint. Ideally sitting the heel into the area between the genitals and the anus - (for men, the base of the penis rests against the bottom heel; for women the heel is placed against the soft tissues of the external genitals).

2. Bend the right knee and place the right foot on top of the left foot. Release the right knee onto the floor, rotating from the hip joint. Place the right ankle on top of the left ankle and tuck the right foot between the left calf and hamstrings. The placement of the bottom heel is an important aspect of Siddhasana. Adjust the body until it is comfortable and the pressure of the heel is firmly applied. Ankle bones should be touching and the heels are one above the other. Press the pubis with the top heel, directly above the genitals. (For men, the genitals will therefore lie between the two heels).

3. Place the hands in gyana mudra: lightly touching the thumb and forefinger of each hand, and extend the other three fingers. Rest the hands on the knees, palms facing up.

4. Breathe smoothly and naturally. As you hold the pose affirm mentally, "I set ablaze
the fire of inner joy.” Or simply: inhale the thought “let”, exhale the thought “go”.

5. Remain in this pose and recite the mantra for as long as desired. The positions of the feet should be switched on alternate days or sittings. As a way of maintaining equilibrium, sit with the right foot on top at the beginning of the class and the left foot on top at the end.

6. To exit, slide the right foot forward off the left foot, straighten the right leg and do the same with the left leg, returning back into Dandasana.

Notes: Siddhasana may be performed with either leg uppermost.

The position of the lower foot at the perineum presses Muladhara chakra, stimulating Mulabandha. The pressure applied to the pubic bone presses the trigger point for Swadisthana automatically activating Vajroli/Sahajoli Mudra. These two psycho-muscular locks redirect sexual nervous impulses back up the spinal cord to the brain, establishing control over the reproductive hormones which is necessary in order to maintain Brahmacharya for spiritual purposes.

Prolonged periods in Siddhasana result in noticeable tingling sensations in the Muladhara region which may last for fifteen to twenty minutes. This is caused by a reduction in the blood supply to the area and by a rebalancing of the pranic flow in the lower Chakras. There is some concern that this trauma to the nerves can lead to impotence in men. Adjust the sitting position (using sitting supports to adjust the position of the genitals) if this is a concern.

Beginner’s Tip:
Bring the left heel to sit on the right ankle bone and allow the top of the left foot to rest on the ground in front of the right foot. If this is still too difficult, place a pillow or blanket under the buttocks.

Modifications:
Many people experience discomfort due to the pressure applied where the ankles cross each other. If necessary, place a folded cloth or piece of sponge between the legs at this point. At first the pressure at the perineum may be uncomfortable to maintain but with practice it will ease.

NOTES:
Sukhasana (Happy Seat)

Don’t let the name fool you. If you’re used to sitting in chairs, Sukhasana can be quite challenging.

Sukhi = Happy

Type of Pose: Seated, Meditation

Benefits:
• Calms the brain
• Strengthens the back
• Stretches the knees and ankles

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Knee injury

Step By Step:
1. Fold a thick blanket or two into a firm support about six inches high. Sit close to one edge of this support and stretch your legs out in front of your torso on the floor in Dandasana (Staff Pose).
2. Cross your shins, widen your knees, and slip each foot beneath the opposite knee as you bend your knees and fold the legs in toward your torso.
3. Relax the feet so their outer edges rest comfortably on the floor and the inner arches settle just below the opposite shin. You’ll know you have the basic leg fold of Sukhasana when you look down and see a triangle, its three sides formed by the two thighs and the crossed shins. Don’t confuse this position with that of other classic seated postures in which the ankles are tucked in close to the sitting bones. In Sukhasana, there should be a comfortable gap between the feet and the pelvis.
4. As always, you should sit with your pelvis in a relatively neutral position. To find neutral, press your hands against the floor and lift your sitting bones slightly off the support. As you hang there for a few breaths, make your thigh bones heavy, then slowly lower your sit bones lightly back to the support. Try to balance your pubic bone and tail bone so they’re equidistant from the floor.
5. Either stack your hands in your lap, palms up, or lay your hands on your knees, palms down. Lengthen your tail bone toward the floor, firm your shoulder blades against your back if you’re your upper torso, but don’t overarch your lower back and poke your lower front ribs forward.
6. You can sit in this position for any length of time, but if you practice this pose regularly, be sure to alternate the cross of the legs. A good rule of thumb: On even-numbered days, cross the right shin in front of the left, and on odd-numbered days, do the opposite. Alternately, you can divide the practice
time in half, and spend the first half with your right leg forward, and the second half with the left leg forward.

NOTES:
Virasana (Hero Pose)

Virasana is a balm for tired legs at the end of the day, as well as an alternative to Lotus for seated meditation.

(veer-AHS-Anna)  
vīra = man, hero, chief

Type of Pose: Seated, Meditation

Benefits:
- Stretches the thighs, knees, and ankles
- Strengthens the arches
- Improves digestion and relieves gas
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Reduces swelling of the legs during pregnancy (through second trimester)
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure and asthma

Contraindications and Cautions:
- Heart problems
- Headache: Practice this pose lying back on a bolster.
- Knee or ankle injury: Avoid this pose unless you have the assistance of an experienced instructor.

Step by Step:
1. Begin kneeling on the mat or a folded blanket (to pad your knees, shins, and feet if necessary), with your inner knees touching. Slide your feet apart slightly wider than your hips. (Option to place a block between your feet). Point your feet straight back, and press the tops of the feet flat on the floor.
2. Exhale and sit back halfway, with your torso leaning slightly forward. Wedge your fingers into the backs of your knees and draw the flesh of the calf muscles toward the heels. Then sit down between your feet (or on the block). Make sure both sitting bones are evenly supported. Allow a thumb's-width space between the inner heels and the outer hips.
3. Take the hands to the knees, and roll the skin back slightly, lengthening the shins. Lengthen through the inner ankles, and press the tops of the feet down into the floor, pinky toes reaching toward the mat.
4. Press the heads of the thigh bones into the floor with the bases of your palms. Then lay your hands in your lap, one on the other, palms up, or on your thighs, palms down.
5. Firm your shoulder blades against the back ribs and lift the top of your sternum like a proud warrior. Widen the collarbones and release the shoulder blades down away from the ears. Lengthen the tailbone toward the floor and draw up from the perineum.

5. At first stay in this pose from 30 seconds to 1 minute. Gradually extend
your stay up to 5 minutes. Never stay longer than 10 minutes in Virasana, and always back out of the posture if you feel knee pain. To come out, press your hands against the floor and lift your buttocks up, slightly higher than the heels. Cross your ankles underneath your buttocks, sit back over the feet and onto the floor, then stretch your legs out in front of you.

**Beginner's Tip:**
Often the inner top feet press more heavily into the floor than the outer top feet. Press the bases of your palms along the outer edges of the feet and gently push the pinky-toe sides of the feet to the floor.

You shouldn’t feel any pressure in the knees. If you feel any knee pain, or raise the height of your hips on a block or do not perform this pose.

**Common Misalignment:**

**Sickled Feet (big toes turned in toward the buttocks, pinky toes lifted):** Assist student in lengthening the inner ankles and pressing tops of feet into the floor. Using the base of your palms, gently press pinky-toe side of foot into the floor.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you learn to lengthen the spine in this pose. Perform Virasana. Have your partner sit behind you and firmly grasp the base of your skull with the thumb and index finger of one hand. As you lengthen the tailbone into the floor, have your partner lift up on the skull base, lengthening the back spine between its two "poles." Release the crease of your neck into this space between the base of the skull and the back of the neck.

**Deepen the Pose:** Cup your hands around the knees, straighten the arms fully, and pull on the knees. Firm your shoulder blades against your back, lift the top sternum, and release your chin down onto the chest without straining the back of your neck. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Then let go of the knees and raise your head back to neutral without losing the lift of the sternum.

**PARVATASANA:** Clasp your hands, extend your arms forward (perpendicular to your torso and parallel to the floor), turn the palms away from your torso (so the thumbs point to the floor), then raise the arms on an inhalation perpendicular to the floor, with the palms facing the ceiling. Stretch up actively through the wrists. Externally rotate the upper arms, lift the shoulders up by the ears, and draw the shoulder blades down the back (without releasing the shoulders down away from the ears).

**Modifications and Props:**
If your ankles are painful in this pose, roll...
up a towel and place it underneath them before you sit back.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Balasana (Child’s Pose)
- Baddha Konasana

**Follow-up Poses:**
- Padmasana (Lotus Pose)
- Bakasana (Crane Pose)
- Inversions, backbends, and standing poses

**NOTES:**
TWISTS

KEY POINTS:
1. Lengthen the spine on the inhalation

2. Twist on the exhalation

3. Twist first from the lower ribs, then the chest, then revolve the skull around the center line

4. Feel even length on both sides of the neck

5. The lumbar spine is not designed to twist. Lengthen out of the low back and initiate the twist from the thoracic spine

6. Both sit bones remain evenly rooted, and both hip bones point forward

7. Hug shoulder blades on to the back
Ardha Matsyendrasana
(Half Lord of the Fishes Pose)

(ARE-dah MOT-see-en-DRAHS-anna)

ardha = half  Matsyendra = king of the fish
(matsya = fish, indra = ruler), a legendary
teacher of yoga

Type of Pose:  Seated Twist

Benefits:
• Stimulates the liver and kidneys
• Stretches the shoulders, hips, and neck
• Energizes the spine
• Stimulates the digestive fire in the belly
• Relieves fatigue, sciatica, and backache
• Therapeutic for asthma and infertility
• Traditional texts say that Ardha Matsyendrasana increases appetite, destroys most deadly diseases, and awakens kundalini.

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Back or spine injury: Perform this pose only with the supervision of an experienced teacher
• Deep twisting, such as Ardha Matsyendrasana may be uncomfortable to women who are menstruating.

Step by Step:
1. Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you, sit bones supported on a folded blanket. Bend your knees, place your feet on the floor, then slide your left foot under your right leg to the outside of your right hip. Lay the outside of the left leg on the floor. Step the right foot over the left leg and stand it on the floor outside your left hip. The right knee will point directly up at the ceiling.

2. Inhale, lengthen the front torso. Exhale, twist toward the inside of the right thigh. Press the right hand against the floor just behind your right buttock, and set your left upper arm on the outside of your right thigh near the knee. Pull your front torso and inner right thigh snuggly together.

3. Press the inner right foot very actively into the floor as you release the right groin. Root the sit bones evenly into the floor and extend up through the spine. Draw both shoulder blades against the back, and continue to lengthen the tailbone into the floor.

4. You can turn your head in one of two directions: Continue the twist of the torso by turning it to the right; or counter the twist of the torso by turning it left and looking over the left shoulder at the right foot. With every inhalation lift a little more through the sternum, pushing the fingers against the floor to help. With each exhalation, twist a little more. Be sure to twist from the thoracic spine; don’t concentrate it in the lower back, as the
lumbar spine is not designed to twist. Stay for 3-5 breaths, then release with an exhalation, return to the starting position, and repeat to the left for the same count of breaths.

**Beginner's Tip:**
In this version of the pose, the opposite-side arm is wrapped around the outside of the raised-leg upper thigh. This may be impractical, and potentially harmful, for **beginning students**. Be sure to sit up well on a blanket support and for the time being just wrap your arm around the raised leg and hug the thigh to your torso.

**Modifications and Props:**
It’s often difficult at first to get the torso snug against the inner thigh. Position yourself a foot or so away from a wall, with your back to the wall; the exact distance will depend on the length of your arms. Exhale into the twist and reach back for the wall. Your arm should be almost but not quite extended (make sure you aren’t sitting too close to the wall, which will jam the shoulder). Push the wall away and move the front torso against the thigh.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you work the opposite-side elbow to the outside of the upper thigh. Get your legs in position as described above and turn to the right. Have your partner sit to your right side, a foot or so away, facing you. Extend your left arm toward your partner, pressing the back of your arm against the top of the right thigh. Your partner can grip your wrist and, at the same time, press his/her feet against the outside of your right thigh. Gently pushing with the feet and pulling with the hands, your partner can draw the left side of your torso out of the inner left groin while you slide the back arm further along and tuck your left side more fully against the top thigh. Remember, though, that your partner shouldn’t force you into a deeper twist, but is merely helping you to lengthen and extend.

**Deepen The Pose:**
If you have the flexibility in the hips and spine you can bring the upper left arm to the outside of the upper right thigh. With the legs in place, exhale and turn to the right. Lean slightly back, away from the upper thigh, and bend the left elbow, pressing it against the outside of the upper right thigh. Then snuggle the torso in against the thigh and work the left upper arm further on to the outer leg until the back of the shoulder presses against the knee. Keep the elbow bent and the hand raised towards the ceiling. Lean into a slight upper-back backbend, firming the shoulder blades against the back, and lift the front torso through the top sternum.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Bharadvajasana (Bharadvajasana Twist)
- Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Pose)
- Virasana (Hero Pose)

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)
- Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Pose)

**NOTES:**
Bharadvajasana I
(Bharadvaja’s Twist)

(bah-ROD-va-JAHS-anna)

_Bharadvaja_ = one of seven legendary seers, credited with composing the hymns collected in the Vedas

**Type of Pose:** Seated Twist

**Benefits:**
- Purifies the entire digestive system
- Massages the abdominal organs
- Stretches the spine, shoulders and hips
- Relieves lower back pain, neck pain and sciatica
- Helps relieve stress
- Especially good in the second trimester of pregnancy to strengthening the lower back pain
- Therapeutic for carpal tunnel syndrome

**Contraindications/Cautions:**
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia
- Low blood pressure
- Menstruation
- First trimester of pregnancy (no twists)
- Knee pain

**Step by Step:**
1. Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Shift over onto your right buttock, bend your knees, and swing your legs to the left. Lay your feet on the floor outside your left hip, with the left ankle resting in the right arch. Move the left calf muscle out with the hand, creating space for the buttock to sit down onto the earth beside the foot. (You may opt to prop up onto a block or blanket to help even out the hips and root the sit bones.)

2. Inhale and lift through the top of the sternum to lengthen the front torso. Then exhale and twist your torso to the right, keeping the left buttock on or very close to the floor. Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor to keep the lower back long. Soften the belly.

3. Tuck your left hand under your right knee (or thigh) and bring your right hand to the floor just beside your right buttock, with the fingers pointing back. Pull your left shoulder back slightly, pressing your shoulder blades firmly against your back even as you continue to twist the chest to the right.

4. You can turn your head in one of two directions: continue the twist of the torso by turning it to the right; or counter the twist of the torso by turning it left and looking over the left shoulder at your feet.
Sense the breath and an opening in the diaphragm and abdomen.

5. With every inhalation lift a little more through the sternum, using the push of the fingertips on the floor to help; with every exhalation twist a little more. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then release with an exhalation, return to the starting position, and repeat to the left for the same length of time.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
If you tilt onto the twisting-side buttock (which compresses the lower back), raise it up on a thickly folded blanket. Consciously sink both sitting bones toward the floor.

**Variations:**

Bharadvajasana II

Sit on the floor with your legs straight in front. Exhale and draw your left leg into Virasana (Hero Pose), then your right leg into Padmasana (Lotus Pose). If the right knee doesn’t rest comfortably on the floor, support it with a thickly folded blanket. Twist to the right and with your left hand grip the outside of the right knee. With an expressive exhalation, swing your right arm around behind your back and grip the right foot. If it isn’t possible to grip the foot directly, use a strap.

**Modifications and Props:**
For an easier variation of this pose, sit sideways on a chair with the chair back to your right. Bring your knees together and your heels directly below your knees. Exhale and twist toward the chair back.

Hold onto the sides of the chair back and lift your elbows up and out to the sides, as if you were pulling the chair back apart. Use the arms to help widen the upper back and move the twist into the space between the shoulder blades.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you learn to ground the opposite-side buttock. If you are twisting to the right, have your partner stand to your left side and place his/her left foot on the very top of your left thigh, with the inner edge of the foot in the groin. Apply gentle pressure at first, and then increase the pressure as it seems appropriate. Exhale into your twist but keep the top left thigh releasing away from your partner’s foot.

**Deepen The Pose:**
You can increase the challenge in this pose by slightly varying the position of the arms and hands. First, exhale and swing your right arm around behind your back as you twist to the right. If you can, grip the left arm just at the elbow with the right hand; if you can’t, hold a strap looped around the left elbow. Then turn your left arm outward (so the palm faces away from the knees) and slip the hand under the right knee, palm on the floor.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Supta Padangusthasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
- Utthita Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)
- Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II)
- Virasana (Hero Pose)
• Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)
- Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Pose)

**NOTES:**
Marichyasana I
(Pose Dedicated to the Sage Marichi)

*(mar-ee-chee-AHS-anna)*
*Mari*chi = literally a ray of light.

Marichi is the great-grandfather of Manu ("man, thinking, intelligent"), the Vedic Adam, and the “father” of humanity.

**Type of Pose:** Seated Twist with Forward Bend

**Benefits:**
- Massages abdominal organs, including the liver and kidneys
- Stretches the shoulders
- Stimulates the brain
- Relieves mild backache and hip pain
- Strengthens and stretches the spine

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
- Diarrhea

**Step by Step:**
1. Sit in Dandasana (Staff Pose). Bend your left knee and place the foot on the floor, with the heel placed in front of the sit bone. Keep the right leg strong and rotated slightly inward, grounding the head of the thighbone into the floor. Press the back of the right heel and the base of the big toe away from the pelvis (creating the “neutral foot”). Make sure the inner left thigh presses firmly against the left side of the torso.

2. As a preparation for the full pose, twist your torso to the right and press the back of the left shoulder against the inside of the left knee. Use this leverage to lengthen the left side of the torso along the thigh. Then gently unwind and face forward.

3. Reach your left arm forward and rotate it inwardly, so the thumb points to the floor and the palm faces out to the left. As you reach the left arm forward, lengthen your torso forward and snuggle the left shin into the armpit. Then on an exhalation, sweep the forearm around the outside of the leg. The left hand will press against the outside of the left thigh or buttock.

4. With another exhalation, sweep the right arm around behind your back. Clasp the right wrist in the left hand. Exhale and extend your torso forward from the groins, keeping the lower belly long. Lower the front torso as closely as possible to the right leg. Be sure the shoulders don’t scrunch up into the ears; draw the shoulders blades actively down your back.

5. Stay in position for 30 seconds to a minute, then come up as you inhale. Repeat on the other side for the same length of time.
Beginner’s Tip:

It is helpful for beginning students to sit up high on a bolster or thickly folded blanket to allow them to move more deeply into the forward bend in this pose. Beginners can also use a strap between the hands if there is some difficulty in clasping the hands behind the back.

Variations:

Marichyasana I can be performed with a slightly different leg position. From Dandasana, bend both knees and place the feet on the floor, heels about a foot away from the sitting bones. Slide the right heel under the left leg to the outside of the left hip and lay the outer leg down on the floor. Then place the left heel just in front of the right ankle. Now perform the pose as described in the steps above.

Preparatory Poses:
- Pachimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)
- Janu Sirsasana (Head to Knee Forward Bend)
- Seated twists

Follow Up Poses:
- Deep seated twists and forward bends

NOTES:
Marichyasana III
(Marici’s Pose)

(mar-ee-chee-AHS-anna)

Marichi = literally means a ray of light (of the sun or moon). Marichi is the son of Brahma and chief of the Maruts (“shining ones”), the war-like storm gods. He’s one of the seven (sometimes 10 or 12) seers (rishis) or lords of creation (prajapatis), who intuitively “see” and declare the divine law of the universe (dharma). Marichi is the great-grandfather of Manu (“man, thinking, intelligent”), the Vedic Adam and the “father” of humanity.

Type of Pose: Seated Twist

Benefits:
• Massages abdominal organs, including the liver and kidneys
• Stretches the shoulders
• Stimulates the brain
• Relieves mild backache and hip pain
• Strengthens and stretches the spine

Contraindications and Cautions:
Serious back or spine injury: Perform this pose only with the supervision of an experienced teacher. Also avoid this pose if you have:
• High or low blood pressure
• Migraine
• Diarrhea
• Headache
• Insomnia

Step by Step:
1. Sit in Dandanasa (Staff Pose), then bend your right knee and put the foot on the floor, with the heel set in front of the right sit bone. Keep the left leg strong and rotated slightly inward; ground the head of the thigh bone into the floor. Press the back of the left heel and the base of the big toe away from the pelvis. Also press the inner right foot actively into the floor, but soften the inner right groin to receive the pubis as you twist. Grounding the straight-leg thigh and bent-knee foot will help you lengthen your spine, which is always the first prerequisite of a successful twist.

2. Inhale, lift the torso to find some length. With an exhalation, rotate the torso to the right and wrap your left arm around the right thigh. Hold the outer thigh with your left hand, then pull the thigh up as you release the right hip toward the floor. Press your right fingertips onto the floor just behind your pelvis to lift the torso slightly up and forward.

3. Remember to keep your straight leg and bent-knee foot grounded. Sink the inner right groin deeper into the pelvis, then lengthen your front belly up out of the groin along the thigh to the floor. Continue lengthening the spine with each inhalation, and twist a little more with
each exhalation. Hug the thigh to the belly, then lean back against your shoulder blades into an upper-back backbend. Gently turn your head to the right to complete the twist in your cervical spine.

4. Stay in the pose for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Release with an exhalation, reverse the legs and twist to the left.

Beginner’s Tip:
It’s often difficult for beginners to sit upright after bending the knee as described in step 1. The pelvis tends to sink backward, which rounds the back and could cause back pain. To offset this problem and keep the pelvis in a neutral position, sit on a thickly folded blanket or bolster.

Variations:
In this pose the head is usually rotated in the same direction as the torso. But it’s also possible to rotate the head counter to the torso. So, for example, when you rotate the torso to the right (as described above), you would rotate your head to the left and gaze out over your left big toe.

Modifications and Props:
Sometimes it’s difficult to get the torso to move into an upright position in this pose, which makes the twist more difficult. Set up the pose with your back about a foot away from a wall. Then after you’ve twisted, press the free hand against the wall and push your torso up and forward.

Deepen The Pose:
The full version of this pose is appropriate only for experienced students. Perform step 1. Exhale and twist the torso to the right, and press your right hand on the floor just behind your pelvis. Swing the back of the left shoulder to the outside of the right knee, keeping the left side of the torso snug against the inside of the right thigh. Reach the left arm forward, toward the right foot; then with an exhalation, sweep the arm around the leg and notch the right shin in the crook of the left elbow. Bring the back of the left hand to the outside of the left hip. Finally with another exhalation, complete the twist by swinging your right arm around the back and clasp the right wrist in your left hand (or have a strap handy to use if the two hands don’t reach). Stay for an equal length of time on both sides, from 30 seconds to 1 minute.

Preparatory Poses:
- Baddha Konasana
- Bharadvajasana
- Gomukhasana
- Janu Sirsasana
- Supta Baddha Konasana
- Supta Padangusthasana
- Upavistha Konasana
- Virasana

Follow-Up Poses:
- Ardha Matsyendrasana
- Baddha Konasana
- Padmasana
- Upavistha Konasana

NOTES:
Parivrtta Parsvakonasana
(Revolved Side Angle Pose)

Since most students can’t easily keep their back heel down in this pose, a modified version will be described here with the back heel raised off the floor. See Deepen the Pose below for a brief description of the full pose.

(par-ee-vrt-tah parsh-vah-cone-AHS-anna)
parivrtta = to turn around, revolve
parsva = side, flank
kona = angle

Type of Pose: Standing Twist
(Closed Hip Posture)

Benefits:
• Strengthens and stretches the legs, knees, and ankles
• Stretches the groins, spine, chest and lungs, and shoulders
• Stimulates abdominal organs
• Increases stamina
• Improves digestion and aids elimination
• Improves balance

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Headache
• High or low blood pressure
• Insomnia

If you have any neck problems, don’t turn your head to look at the top arm; instead look straight ahead with the sides of the neck lengthened evenly, or look down at the floor.

Step by Step:
1. Stand in Tadasana, feet hip-distance apart. With an exhalation, bend the knees and step the left foot back 3½ to 4 feet, landing on separate tracks. Rest your hands on your hips. Point the right toes straight ahead and turn the left toes out just slightly to 20 degrees, rooting the heel. (If the heel does not root, shorten your stance until it does). Firm the front calf muscle to the shinbone and see that the kneecap aligns with center of the right ankle.

2. Exhale and bend your right knee forward. (Virabhadrasana I). Keep your left leg active by pressing the thigh up toward the ceiling and extending strongly through the left heel. At the same time, resist the lift of the left thigh by pressing the tailbone toward the pubis.

3. With another exhalation, hinge forward from the hips and take the left hand to the floor inside the right foot, right hand remains on the hip. Pivot onto the toes of the back foot to face both hip points toward the floor.

4. Inhale, lengthen the torso out of the low back, sending the heart forward.
Exhale, twist just the upper back to the right. Firm the shoulder blades into the back ribs and lean the torso back slightly, away from the inner thigh. Stay in this position for a few breaths.

5. If this position seems challenging enough, stay for the recommended time. If you want to go further, bend your left elbow and bring it to the outside of the right knee. Join both palms together in Anjali Mudra. Resist the knee and elbow against each other. If possible, straighten your left elbow and reach the hand toward the floor (if you can’t reach the floor, support your hand on a block). You can keep your right hand on your hip, or stretch it over the back of the right ear with the palm facing down. Then turn your head to look at the right arm. As in all twists lengthen out of the low back, extend the spine with each inhalation, and increase the twist as you exhale.

6. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Inhale to come up, exhale to release the twist. Reverse the feet and repeat for the same length of time to the left. Then return to Tadasana.

Beginner’s Tip:
Beginners often have difficulty maintaining their balance in this pose, especially with the back heel lifted off the floor. To improve your balance, support your heel, either by standing it on a sandbag or thick book, or by bracing it against a wall.

Variations:
You can perform this pose with your hands in a modified Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal). Perform steps 1 through 4 in the main description above. Press the bent elbow against the outside of the bent knee, but don’t straighten the arm. Then bend the top elbow and press your palms together. You probably won’t be able to touch your thumbs to your sternum, as you do in traditional Anjali Mudra. Open your elbows wide, stretching your bottom elbow toward the floor, the top elbow toward the ceiling. Use the pressure of the elbow against the knee and the palms against each other like a crank to increase the twist in the upper back.

Modifications and Props:
Here’s an exercise that will help you deepen the twist in this pose by modifying it in an unusual way. Perform steps 1 through 3 in the main description above, with a block underneath the bottom hand. Shift onto the outside edge (little-toe side) of the back foot, and walk the block away from the inner foot about 12 to 18 inches. Lean the torso back away from the inner bent leg, as if doing a backbend, and on an exhalation, twist the front of the torso to face up at the ceiling. You can press the free palm against the sacrum, or stretch the arm over the back of the top ear.
**Partnering:**
A partner can help you deepen the twist in this pose. Perform the pose with the outside of your back leg and hip braced against a wall (for the purposes of this description we'll say you're twisting to the right with your left leg and hip on the wall). Have your partner sit on the floor outside your right thigh and hip, facing you. She should press one foot against your outer thigh, just above the knee, and the other foot against your right hip (now the pelvis is squeezed between your partner’s foot and the wall). Reach your left arm out toward your partner. She should grasp the forearm and gently tug the arm toward her as she pushes her feet on the thigh and hip. Have her pull according to your capacity.

**Preparatory Poses:**
Most of the standing poses are appropriate preparations for this challenging standing twist, especially Parivrtta Trikonasana.

You might also try wide-open groin poses like Baddha Konasana and Upavistha Konasana; thigh stretchers like Virasana and its reclining variation; and hip openers like Gomukhasana.

**Follow-up Poses:**
Parivrtta Parsvakonasana is a good preparation for a standing pose like Garudasana, and for sitting cousins such as Gomukhasana, Bharadvajasana, and Marichyasana III.

**Deepen the Pose:**
Advanced students will want to keep the back heel as much as possible on the floor. Be sure to rotate the back foot in more than you do for most other standing poses. Take a little support under the back heel if needed at first.

**NOTES:**
Parivrtta Trikonasana
(Revolved Triangle Pose)

(par-ee-vrit-tah trik-cone-AHS-anna)
parivrtta = to turn around, revolve
trikona = three angle or triangle

Type of Pose: Standing Twist
twisting to the left.

Benefits:
• Strengthens and stretches the legs
• Stretches the hips and spine
• Opens the chest to improve breathing
• Relieves mild back pain
• Stimulates the abdominal organs
• Improves sense of balance

Contraindications and Cautions:
Back or spine injury. Perform this pose only with the supervision of an experienced teacher or avoid it altogether. Also avoid this pose if you have:

• Low blood pressure
• Migraine
• Diarrhea
• Headache
• Insomnia

Step by Step:
1. Stand in Tadasana, feet hip-distance apart. With an exhalation, bend the knees and step the left foot back 3½ to 4 feet, landing on separate tracks. Rest your hands on your hips. Point the right toes straight ahead and turn the left toes out just slightly to 20 degrees, rooting the heel. (If the heel does not root, shorten your stance until it does). Press the mounds of the right foot into the floor and activate the right calf, pressing it forward toward the shin. This will create a safe straightening of the front leg. See that the right kneecap aligns with center of the right ankle. Draw the right hip back and the left hip forward to square the hips. Roll the left thigh in and back, rooting the left heel.

2. Extend the left arm upward toward the ceiling and place the right hand on the right hip. On an exhalation, turn your torso slightly to the right, keeping your hip points as square as possible with the front edge of your mat. As you bring the left hip around to the right, resist the head of the left thigh bone back and firmly ground the left heel.

3. Inhale, lengthen through the front of the torso, and on an exhalation, turn the upper torso further to the right, and extend forward over the front leg. Reach your left hand down, either to the floor (inside or outside the foot) or, if the floor is too far away, onto a block positioned against your inner right foot.
Turn just the upper back a little further to the right and when you are ready, reach the right arm up to the ceiling. Keep the front calf muscle active and pressing forward to the shin bone.

(Allow the left hip to release slightly toward the floor. You may feel the right hip slip out to the side and lift up toward the shoulder and the torso hunch over the front leg. To counteract this, press the outer right thigh actively to the left and release the right hip away from the right shoulder. Use your right hand, if necessary, to create these two movements, hooking the thumb into the right hip crease).

4. Beginning students should keep their head in a neutral position, looking straight forward, or turn it to look at the floor. More experienced students can turn the head and gaze up at the top thumb. From the center of the back, between the shoulder blades, press the arms away from the torso. Bring most of your weight to bear on the back heel and the front hand.

5. Stay in this pose anywhere from 30 seconds to one minute. Exhale, release the twist, and bring your torso back to upright with an inhalation. Repeat for the same length of time with the legs reversed.

Beginner’s Tip:
This pose is slightly easier with a narrower stance. Beginners should also, as suggested in the main description, bring their hand to the inner foot, whether on the floor or on a support like a block or folding chair.

Variations:
Parivrtta Trikonasana leads into a very interesting variation, not usually described in popular instruction manuals, called Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana (Revolved Half Moon Pose). Perform the pose (twisting to the right). Then exhale, bend the right knee and reach the left hand forward on the floor (or onto a block) about 12 to 18 inches beyond the right foot (with the hand positioned on the big toe side of the foot). Inhale and straighten the right knee, lifting the left foot off the floor and bringing the leg parallel to the floor. Hold for 30 seconds to a minute, return the left foot to the floor with an exhalation, and leave the twist as described in step 5 above. Repeat on the other side.

Modifications and Props:
One of the most common problems in this pose is the inability to keep the back heel grounded, which makes the pose very unstable. There are various ways to deal with the back heel. First, of course, you can just accept the situation and work diligently to press through the heel (and open the back-leg groin) even though it’s off the floor. Second, you can perform the pose with your back heel wedged against a wall, which gives you something to push into. Or finally, you can raise the back heel on a lift and, over time, work to gradually lower the lift until the heel stays on the floor.

Deepen the Pose:
When you bring the bottom hand to the outside of the forward leg, press the forearm firmly against the outer shin. This pressure of arm-against-leg will help your torso rotate more deeply into the pose.
Partnering/ Teacher Assist:
A partner can help you stabilize and align this position and get a better feel for the twist. Perform steps 1 and 2 in the main description above. Have your partner stand behind you and wrap a strap across your front hip crease. Then continue with the rest of the pose. As you move into the twist, the partner will pull firmly on the ends of the strap, dragging the front groin deeper into the pelvis and the outer front hip away from the shoulder. Also, he can pull in on the strap to help you keep the front hip tucked in and, with one of his feet, press against and ground your back heel.

Preparatory Poses:
- Baddha Konasana
- Prasarita Padottanasana
- Siddhasana or Sukhasana
- Uttanasana
- Utthita Parsvottanasana
- Utthita Parsvakonasana
- Utthita Trikonasana
- Virabhadrasana II
- Virasana
- Vrksasana

Follow-up Poses:
Parivrrta Trikonasana is usually sequenced just after (as a counter pose to) Trikonasana. You can also use this pose as a standing preparation for seated forward bends like Janu Sirsasana and seated twists like Ardha Matsyendrasana and Marichyasana III.

NOTES:
INVERSIONS

KEY POINTS:

1. Prepare With a Calm Mind

2. Connect with the core

3. Arms and Shoulders Support the Weight of the Body (Rather Than the Spine)

4. Tadasana Torso and Legs

5. Leave Enough Strength to Get Out of the Pose With Ease
Sirsasana (Headstand)

(sah-LOM-bah shear-SHAHS-anna)
salamba = with support  sirs = head

Type of Pose: Inversion

Benefits:
- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Stimulates the pituitary and pineal glands
- Strengthens the arms, legs, and spine
- Strengthens the lungs
- tones the abdominal organs
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Therapeutic for asthma and other lung conditions, infertility, insomnia, and sinusitis

Contraindications/ Cautions:
- Back injury
- Headache
- Heart condition
- High blood pressure
- Menstruation
- Neck injury
- Low blood pressure: Don’t start practice with this pose
- Pregnancy: If you are experienced with this pose, you can continue to practice it late into pregnancy. However, don’t take up the practice of Sirsasana after you become pregnant.
- Sirsasana is considered to be an intermediate to advanced pose. Do not perform this pose without sufficient prior experience or unless you have the supervision of an experienced teacher. Some schools of yoga recommend doing Sirsasana before Sarvangasana, others vice versa. The instruction here assumes the former order.

Step by Step:
1. Use a folded blanket or sticky mat to pad your head and forearms. Kneel on the floor. Lace your fingers together (perhaps tucking the baby finger in) and set the forearms on the floor, elbows at shoulder width. Roll the upper arms slightly outward, but press the inner wrists firmly into the floor. Set the crown of your head on the floor. If you are just beginning to practice this pose, press the bases of your palms together and snuggle the back of your head against the clasped hands. More experienced students can open their hands and place the back of the head into the open palms.

2. Inhale and lift your knees off the floor. Carefully walk your feet closer to your elbows, heels elevated. Walk far enough in so that the hips stack above the shoulders. Actively lift through the top
thighs, forming an inverted "V." Firm the shoulder blades against your back and lift them toward the tailbone so the front torso stays as long as possible. This should help prevent the weight of the shoulders collapsing onto your neck and head.

3. Exhale and lift your feet away from the floor, drawing both knees into the chest. Try to take both feet up at the same time, even if it means bending your knees and hopping lightly off the floor. As the legs (or thighs, if your knees are bent) rise to perpendicular to the floor, firm the tailbone against the back of the pelvis. (If the knees are still bent, actively extend them up to the ceiling and draw the heels toward the buttocks). Turn the upper thighs in slightly, and actively press the heels toward the ceiling (straightening the knees if you bent them to come up). The center of the arches should align over the center of the pelvis, which in turn should align over the crown of the head.

4. Firm the outer arms inward, and soften the fingers. Continue to press the forearms into the floor and lift the shoulder blades away from the ears. (Firm the shoulder blades against the back, widen them, and draw them toward the tailbone. Keep the weight evenly balanced on the two forearms). It’s also essential that your tailbone continues to lift upward toward the heels. Once the backs of the legs are fully lengthened through the heels, maintain that length and press up through the balls of the big toes so the inner legs are slightly longer than the outer.

5. As a beginning practitioner stay for 10 seconds. Gradually add 5 to 10 seconds onto your stay every day or so until you can comfortably hold the pose for 3 minutes. Then continue for 3 minutes each day for a week or two, until you feel relatively comfortable in the pose. Again gradually add 5 to 10 seconds onto your stay every day or so until you can comfortably hold the pose for 5 minutes. Come down with an exhalation, without losing the lift of the shoulder blades, with both feet touching the floor at the same time.

Beginner’s Tip:
Beginners tend to take too much weight onto the neck and head when coming into and exiting this pose, a potentially harmful situation. Prepare to do this pose as described above against a wall. To come up, set your arms in place and lift your head slightly off the floor. Move into the wall-supported position with the head off the floor, then lower it lightly onto the floor. Support 90 to 95 percent of your weight on your shoulders and arms, even if it means staying for only a few seconds. Gradually, over time, take more and more weight onto your head, but proceed slowly. Similarly, when you exit this pose, first lift your head off the floor, then bring your feet down. Eventually you will be able to keep your head on the floor when going up and coming down.

Variations:
One of the simplest Sirsasana variations is called Eka Pada Sirsasana (pronounced ACHE-ah PAH-dah, eka = one, pada = foot or leg). Come into the pose. Stabilize your left leg perpendicular to the floor.
Exhale and lower your right leg parallel to the floor without disturbing the position of the left. The outer hip of the down leg (in this case, the right) tends to sink toward the floor. To correct this, turn the right leg outward, moving its sitting bone toward the left. Hold the two sitting bones close and rotate (from the hip joint only) the right leg back to neutral. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds, inhale the right leg back to perpendicular, and repeat on the left for the same length of time.

**Modifications & Props:**
Balance in this pose is difficult at first. Perform Sirsasana against a wall. Bring the knuckles of the clasped hands to the wall. If possible, do the pose in the corner of a room, so that the right-angled walls touch your shoulders, hips, and outer heels.

**Partnering/Assists:**
A partner can help you with your alignment in this pose. Have your partner stand to one side and look at the major alignment "landmarks" along the side of your body: the outer ankle bone, the center of the hip, the center of the shoulder, and the ear hole. These points should all be in one line perpendicular to the floor (Just like in Tadasana!).

**Deepen the Pose:**
Check the position of the inner wrists in the pose. They tend to fall outward, shifting the weight onto the outer forearms. Turn the pinkies away from the back of your head, and bring the inner wrists perpendicular to the floor. As you firm the outer upper arms inward, press the wrists actively into the floor.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
- Virasana (Hero’s Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Balasana (Child’s Pose)

**NOTES:**
Salamba Sarvangasana
(Supported Shoulderstand)

(sah-LOM-bah sar-van-GAHS-anna)

salamba = with support
sarva = all
anga = limb

Type of Pose: Inversion

Benefits:
• Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
• Stimulates the thyroid and prostate glands and abdominal organs
• Stimulates the internal organs
• Stretches the shoulders and neck
• Tones the legs and buttocks
• Increases metabolism
• Improves digestion
• Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
• Reduces fatigue and alleviates insomnia
• Therapeutic for asthma, infertility, sinusitis, varicose veins & edema
• Reduces blood pressure

Contraindications/Cautions:
• Diarrhea
• Headache
• High blood pressure
• Menstruation
• Neck injury
• Pregnancy: If you are experienced with this pose, you can continue to practice it late into pregnancy. However, don’t take up the practice of Sarvangasana after you become pregnant.
• Salamba Sarvangasana is considered to be an intermediate to advanced pose. Do not perform this pose without sufficient prior experience or unless you have the supervision of an experienced instructor. Some schools of yoga recommend doing Salamba Sirsasana before Salamba Sarvangasana, others vice versa. The instruction here assumes the former order.

Step by Step:
1. Fold two or more firm blankets into rectangles measuring about 1 foot by 2 feet, and stack them one on top of the other. You can place a sticky mat over the blankets to help the upper arms stay in place while in the pose. Then lie on the blankets with your shoulders supported (and parallel to one of the longer edges) and your head on the floor. Lay your arms on the floor alongside your torso, then bend your knees and set your feet against the floor with the heels close to the sitting bones. Roll the shoulder blades just slightly in toward the spine and place...
hands under the buttocks, palms spread wide and face down, thumbs touching.

2. Connect to your core. Draw the navel in toward the spine. With one fluid like motion, draw the knees into the chest and lift the hips up off the floor. Immediately bring your hands to the low back for support. With bent knees, gently begin to walk your elbows in closer together, drawing your shoulder blades even closer in toward the spine. All the weight should be on the shoulders. Raise your pelvis over the shoulders, so that the torso is relatively perpendicular to the floor. Walk your hands up your back (toward the floor) without letting the elbows slide too much wider than shoulder width.

3. Inhale and lift your bent knees toward the ceiling, bringing your thighs in line with your torso and hanging the heels down by your buttocks. Press your tailbone toward your pubis and turn the upper thighs inward slightly. Finally, inhale and straighten the legs, pressing the heels up toward the ceiling. When the backs of the legs are fully lengthened, lift through the balls of the big toes so the inner legs are slightly longer than the outer.

4. Soften the throat and tongue. Firm the shoulder blades against the back, and move the sternum toward the chin. Your forehead should be relatively parallel to the floor, your chin level with the forehead. Press the backs of your upper arms and the tops of your shoulders actively into the blanket support, and try to lift the upper spine away from the floor. Never turn your head in Shoulder Stand, nor should you be resting on your cervical spine. Gaze softly at your chest or up the midline of the body.

5. As a beginning practitioner, stay in the pose for about 30 seconds. Gradually add 5 to 10 seconds to your stay every day or so until you can comfortably hold the pose for 3 minutes. Then continue for 3 minutes each day for a week or two, until you feel relatively comfortable in the pose. Again, gradually add 5 to 10 seconds onto your stay every day or so until you can comfortably hold the pose for 5 minutes. To come down, exhale, bend your knees into your torso again, and roll your back torso slowly and carefully onto the floor, keeping the back of your head connected to the floor all the way down.

**Variations:**

One of the simplest Sarvangasana variations is Eka Pada Sarvangasana (pronounced ACHE-ah PAH-dah, eka = one, pada = foot or leg). Come into the pose. Stabilize your left leg perpendicular to the floor, then exhale and lower your right leg parallel to the floor without disturbing the position of the left. The outer hip of the down leg (in this case, the right) tends to sink toward the floor. To correct this, turn the right leg outwardly, moving its sitting bone toward the left. Hold the two sitting bones close and rotate (from the hip joint only) the right leg back to neutral. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds, inhale the right leg back to perpendicular, and repeat on the left for the same length of time.
Beginner’s Tip:

Beginners’ elbows tend to slide apart and the upper arms roll inward, which sinks the torso onto the upper back, collapsing the pose (and potentially straining the neck). Before coming onto your blanket support, roll up a sticky mat and set it on the support, with its long axis parallel to the back edge (the edge opposite the shoulder edge). Then come up with your elbows lifted on and secured by the sticky mat.

Modifications and Props:

1. Half Shoulder Stand – instead of lifting the to be perpendicular to the floor, maintain a slight hinge at the hip and allow the legs to be slightly angled in toward the body.

2. Using the wall - Rolling up into Sarvangasana from the floor might be difficult at first. You can use a wall to help you get into the pose. Set your blankets up a foot or so from the wall (the exact distance depends on your height: (Taller students will be farther from the wall, shorter students closer). Sit sideways on your support (with one side toward the wall) and, on an exhalation, swing your shoulders down onto the edge of the blanket and your legs up onto the wall. Bend your knees to right angles, push your feet against the wall and lift your pelvis off the support. When your torso and thighs are perpendicular to the floor, lift your feet away from the wall and complete the pose. To come down, exhale your feet back to the wall and roll down.

Partnering: A partner can help you learn to use your back torso to open the front. In Sarvangasana, balancing on the tops of your shoulders, stretch your arms behind you (toward the back edge of the blanket support), approximately parallel to each other. Have the partner then sit down on your support, between your arms, with his/her back pressed to yours. Lean against each other and use the contact to press
your shoulder blades deeper into the back, opening the sternum toward the chin. Your partner can also press your upper arms more firmly into the floor.

**Deepen The Pose:** It’s common in this pose for students to press only the index finger sides of the hands against the back. Be sure to spread both palms wide against your back torso. Push in and up against the back ribs, especially with the ring fingers and pinkies. Periodically take your hands away from the back, press the shoulder blades in, and return your hands to the back a little closer to the head than they were before.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Sirsasana (Headstand) is best to be done before Shoulder Stand, rather than after. Headstand compresses the cervical spine and doing Shoulder Stand afterward will help to lengthen the cervical spine.
- Setu Bandhasana (Bridge Pose)
- Virasana (Hero’s Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Halasana (Plow Pose)
- Matsyasana (Fish Pose)

**NOTES:**
Halasana  (Plow Pose)

(hah-LAHS-anna)
hala = plow

Type of Pose: Inversion

Benefits:
• Calms the brain
• Stimulates and massages the kidneys, adrenal glands, thyroid gland, diaphragm, and all of the abdominal organs
• Stretches the shoulders and spine
• Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
• Reduces stress and fatigue
• Therapeutic for backache, headache, infertility, insomnia, sinusitis

Contraindications/Cautions:
• Diarrhea
• Menstruation
• Neck injury
• Heart disease, stroke
• Asthma & high blood pressure: Practice Halasana with the legs supported on props.
• Pregnancy: If you are experienced with this pose, you can continue to practice it late into pregnancy. However, don’t take up the practice of Halasana after you become pregnant.
• With the feet on the floor, this pose is considered to be intermediate to advanced. It is not advisable to perform the pose in this way without sufficient prior experience or unless you have the supervision of an experienced instructor.

Step by Step:
1. From Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand) with the hands supporting the back of the torso. Exhale and hinge at the hip joints to slowly lower your toes to the floor (or prop) above and beyond your head. As much as possible, keep your torso perpendicular to the floor and your legs fully extended. The feet should be lowered to a height where the spine can remain neutral without rounding.

2. With your toes on the floor, lift your top thighs and tailbone toward the ceiling and draw your inner groins deep into the pelvis. Imagine that your torso is hanging from the height of your groins. Continue to draw your chin away from your sternum and soften your throat.

3. You can continue to press your hands against the back torso, pushing the back up toward the ceiling as you press the backs of the upper arms down, onto your support. Or you can release your hands away from your back and stretch the arms out behind you on the floor, opposite the legs. Clasp the hands and press the arms actively down on the support as you lift the thighs toward the ceiling. (Release
your hands from the back only when the toes are firmly rooting into the floor or prop. If the toes do not meet the floor, keep the hands pressing against the back torso).

4. Halasana is usually performed after Sarvangasana for anywhere from 1 to 5 minutes. To exit the pose bring your hands onto your back again, lift back into Sarvangasana with an exhalation, then roll down onto your back, or simply roll out of the pose on an exhalation.

Beginner’s Tip: In this pose (and its companion, Salamba Sarvangasana) there’s a tendency to overstretch the neck by pulling the shoulders too far away from the ears. While the tops of the shoulders should push down into the support, they should be lifted slightly toward the ears to keep the back of the neck and throat soft. Open the sternum by firming the shoulder blades against the back.

Variations:

Parsva Halasana (pronounced PARSH-vah, parsva = side or flank)

This pose can only be performed with the feet on the floor. Perform Halasana, keeping your hands on your back. With an exhalation walk your feet to the left as far as you comfortably can. One hip or the other may sink toward the floor, so try to keep the pelvis in a relatively neutral position, hips parallel to the floor. Hold for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then inhale the feet back to center. Take 2 or 3 breaths, then exhale the feet to the right for the same length of time, come back to center, and release Halasana.

Modifications and Props: Most beginning students can’t comfortably rest their feet on the floor (nor is it advisable for the neck). But you can still practice this pose with an appropriate prop. Brace the back of a metal folding chair against a wall (if you like, cover the seat with a folded sticky mat), and set one long edge of your support a foot or so away from the front edge of the seat. The exact distance between the chair and support will depend on your height (taller students will be farther away, shorter students closer). Lie down on the support with your head on the floor between the blanket support and the chair. Roll up with an exhalation, rest your feet on the seat (and check to see that you are neither too close nor too far from the chair), then lift into Salamba Sarvangasana first before moving into Halasana.

Partnering: A partner can help you learn about the lift of the front thighs in this pose. Perform Halasana, either with your feet on the floor or a chair. Then have your partner straddle your legs, facing your torso. Loop a strap around your top thighs in the creases of the groins. Your partner can pull straight up on the strap, perpendicular to the line of your legs, and lift your top thighs toward the ceiling. Extend strongly through the heels and move your scapulas firmly into your back.

Deepen The Pose: When coming into this pose (and its companion, Salamba Sarvangasana) you can squeeze the shoulder blades together to help yourself
lift up onto the tops of the shoulders. But once situated in the position, broaden the shoulder blades across the back, into the resistance of the outer upper arms.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand)
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Fold)
- Matsyasana (Fish Pose)

**NOTES:**
ARM BALANCES

KEY POINTS:
1. Calm the Mind

2. Feel the Hands as Feet, Feet as Hands

3. Patient, Progressive Work

4. Core Stability
**Bakasana (Crane Pose)**

A compact arm balance, Crane Pose tones and strengthens the abdominal organs and arms.

(bahk-AHS-anna), baka = crane

**Benefits:**
- Strengthens arms and wrists
- Stretches the upper back
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles
- Opens the groins
- Tones the abdominal organs

**Contraindications:**
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Pregnancy

**Step by Step:**
1. Squat down from Tadasana with your inner feet a few inches apart (see Malasana). If it isn’t possible to keep your heels on the floor, support them on a thickly folded blanket. Separate your knees wider than your hips and lean the torso forward, between the inner thighs. Stretch your arms forward, then bend your elbows, place your hands on the floor and the backs of the upper arms against the shins.

2. Snuggle your inner thighs against the sides of your torso, and your shins into your armpits, and slide the upper arms down as low onto the shins as possible. Lift up onto the balls of your feet and lean forward even more, taking the weight of your torso onto the backs of the upper arms. In Bakasana you consciously attempt to contract your front torso and round your back completely. To help yourself do this, pull the navel into the back bone and keep your tailbone as close to your heels as possible.

3. With an exhalation, lean forward even more onto the backs of your upper arms, to the point where the balls of your feet leave the floor. (For beginners: Pick up one foot off the floor at a time). Now your torso and legs are balanced on the backs of your upper arms. As a beginner at this pose, you might want to stop here, perched securely on the bent arms.

4. But if you are ready to go further, squeeze the legs against the arms, press the inner hands firmly to the floor and (with an inhalation) straighten the elbows. Seen from the side the arms are angled slightly forward relative to the floor. The inner knees should be glued to the outer arms, high up near the armpits. Keep the head in a neutral position with your eyes looking at the floor, or lift the head slightly, without compressing the back of the neck, and look forward.

5. Stay in the pose anywhere from 20 seconds to 1 minute. To release, exhale
and slowly lower your feet to the floor, back into a squat. Stretch out the wrists.

**Beginner’s Tip:** Beginners tend to move into this pose by lifting their buttocks high away from their heels. In Bakasana try to keep yourself tucked tight, with the heels and buttocks close together. When you are ready to take the feet off the floor, push the upper arms against the shins and draw your inner groins deep into the pelvis to help you with the lift.

**Variation:**
The most accessible variation of Bakasana is a twist: Parsva Bakasana (pronounced PARSH-va, parsva = side or flank). Squat as described above, but keep your knees together. Exhale and turn your torso to the right, bracing the left elbow to the outside of the right knee. Work the arm along the knee, until the knee is firm against the upper arm, near the armpit. Set the hands on the floor, lean to the right, and lift the feet off the floor on an exhalation, balancing with the outer left arm pressed against the outer right leg. Straighten the arms as much as possible, though no doubt for most students the elbows will remain slightly bent. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, exhale back to the squat, and repeat to the left for the same length of time.

**Modifications & Props:** Some students have a difficult time lifting into Bakasana from the floor. It’s often helpful to prepare for this pose squatting on a block or other height, so that your feet are a few inches off the floor. You may also place a blanket under the head for security.

**Partnering:** A partner can help you learn to balance in Bakasana, especially if you are reluctant to lean forward and take your feet off the floor. Squat in the ready position, hands on the floor, up on the balls of your feet. Have the partner stand in front of you. As you lean forward he/she will support your shoulders with his/her thighs, to prevent you from toppling forward onto your face or head. Your partner will also place her hands in between your thighs and torso, lightly pulling your lower abdomen up and toward her. Stay for a few breaths, getting a taste for the balanced position, yet secure in the hands of your partner.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
- Balasana (Child’s Pose)
- Plank Pose
- Virasana (Hero’s Pose)

**Follow Up Poses:**
- Inversions and Savasana (Final Relaxation Pose)

**Deepen the Pose:** The full pose sometimes causes varying degrees of pain in the wrists. Instead of spreading the fingers on the floor, curl them slightly.

**NOTES:**
**Pincha Mayurasana**  
(Forearm Balance/ Feathered Peacock Pose)

(pin-cha my-your-AHS-anna)  
piñca = tail feather, mayura = peacock

**Type of Pose:** Arm Balance, Inversion

**Benefits:**
- Strengthens the shoulders, arms, and back
- Stretches the shoulders and neck, chest, and belly
- Improves sense of balance
- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
- Back, shoulder, or neck injury
- Headache
- Heart condition
- High blood pressure
- Menstruation

**Step by Step:**
1. Perform a modified **Adho Mukha Svanasana** at your yoga wall, with your palms and forearms on the floor. Your fingertips should be right at the base of the wall, and your forearms parallel to each other at shoulder width. This pose isn’t quite as scary as Adho Mukha Vrksasana; it has a firmer base of support, and the head isn’t as far away from the floor. But it can still be somewhat intimidating. To ready yourself for and secure yourself in this inversion, firm your shoulder blades against your back torso and pull them toward your tailbone. Then rotate your upper arms outward, to keep the shoulder blades broad, and hug your forearms inward. Finally spread your palms and press your inner wrists firmly against the floor.

2. Now bend one knee and step the foot in, closer to the wall (let’s say the left leg), but keep the other (i.e. right) leg active by extending through the heel. Then take a few practice hops before you try to launch yourself upside down. Sweep your right leg through a wide arc toward the wall and kick your left foot off the floor, immediately pushing through the heel to straighten the leg. Hop up and down like this several times, each time pushing off the floor a little higher. Exhale deeply each time you hop.

3. Hopping up and down like this may be all you can manage for now. Regularly practice your strength poses, like Adho Mukha Svanasana (or the modified version that’s the beginning position...
Plank Pose, and Chaturanga Dandasana. Eventually you’ll be able to kick all the way into the pose. At first your heels may crash into the wall, but again with more practice you’ll be able to swing your heels up lightly to the wall.

4. If your armpits and groins are tight, your lower back may be deeply arched. To lengthen it, draw your front ribs into your torso, reach your tailbone toward your heels, and slide your heels higher up the wall. Draw the navel toward the spine. Squeeze the outer legs together and roll the thighs in. In Pincha Mayurasana your head should be off the floor; hang it from a spot between your shoulder blades and gaze out into the center of the room.

5. Stay in the pose 10 to 15 seconds. Gradually work your way up to 1 minute. When you come down, be sure not to sink onto the shoulders. Keep your shoulder blades lifted and broad, and take one foot down at a time with an exhalation. Lift into Adho Mukha Svanasana for 30 seconds to a minute. We tend to kick up with the same leg all the time: be sure to alternate your kicking leg, one day right, next day left.

Beginner’s Tip: Many beginners find it difficult to prevent their elbows from sliding away from each other in this pose. Buckle a strap and loop it over your upper arms, just above your elbows. Extend your arms straight out in front of you at shoulder width and adjust the strap so that it hugs your outer arms. Then use the strap in the pose, but think of pushing the arms slightly in, away from the strap, rather than letting them bulge out into the strap.

Modifications and Props:
Traditionally the palms are placed flat on the floor in this pose. However, it’s possible to change the position of your forearms and hands. You’ll need a block to brace your hands. You can make the pose slightly easier by pressing your palms flat on the ends of the block, so your wrists are perpendicular to the floor. Be sure to curl your fingers around the back of the block and then touch your fingers to your yoga wall. Press the inner wrists actively toward the floor. Or you can turn your palms up to face the ceiling, with the pinky sides of the hands on the block. This will help you learn about the rotation of the upper arms. Keep the palms lively and the thumbs stretching away from the ends of the block.

VARIATION:

Partnering:
Two partners can help you get a better sense of grounding the pose through the inner wrists. Position your partners at the wall just outside your forearms, and facing toward you, as you perform the pose. Have each of them press down on a wrist
with one of their feet. They should start with the foot on the outer wrist and then, as they press down, roll the foot toward the inner wrist, where the grounding pressure should be concentrated. Help them to regulate the pressure, telling them whether you want less or more. Make sure that both partners are pressing with the same amount of force.

**Deepen The Pose:**
Advanced students should gradually move away from the wall and learn how to balance without support. Sit on the floor with your legs fully extended and your feet against the yoga wall. Make an imaginary mark on the floor beside your knees, then set yourself up for the pose with your elbows on this mark. Your hands will now be slightly away from the wall. Then kick up, bend your knees, and touch your feet on the wall. If you’re in the right spot, your upper arms, torso, and thighs should all be aligned perpendicular to the floor, and your knees at a right angle. Keep one foot on the wall and extend the other leg fully, pushing the heel actively toward the ceiling. After a few breaths, bend that knee and return the foot to the wall, then repeat with the other leg. Finally, with an inhalation, try to straighten both legs and balance.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand)
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Gomukhasana (Cow-Face Pose)
- Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide Leg Forward Bend - with a block squeezed between the bent elbows)
- Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)
- Uttanasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand)
- Adho Mukha Svanasana (Down Dog)
- Gomukhasana (Cow-Face Pose)
- Sirsasana (Headstand)

**NOTES:**
RESTORATIVE POSES

KEY POINTS:

1. Surrender to Gravity

2. Feel the Weight of the Body Sinking Into Earth

3. Soften the Face. Relax Jaw and Tongue

4. Mind Stays Open & Aware of Breath and Sensations
Balasana (Child's Pose)

Balasana is a restful pose that can be sequenced between more challenging asanas.

(bah-LAHS-anna)  *bala* = child

**Type of Pose:** Calming Pose with forward bend qualities.

**Benefits:**
- Gently stretches the hips, thighs and ankles
- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and fatigue
- Relieves back and neck pain when done with head and torso supported

**Contraindications:**
- Diarrhea
- Pregnancy
- Knee injury: Avoid Balasana unless you have the supervision of an experienced teacher.

**Step by Step:**
1. Kneel on the floor. Set your knees hip-width apart and touch your big toes together.

2. Exhale, draw the sit bones back toward the heels and bring your forehead to the floor (or block). Lay the tailbone heavy on the heels while you lift the base of your skull away from the back of your neck.

3. Extend the arms out in front of you, fingers spread wide, or lay your hands on the floor alongside your torso, palms facing up, releasing the fronts of your shoulders toward the floor. Feel how the weight of the front shoulders pulls the shoulder blades wide across your back.

4. Balasana is a resting pose. As you inhale, feel the belly expanding into the thighs and the lower back opening to space. Breathe into the space behind the heart and feel the upper back expanding. Imagine the back is shaped like a rainbow. Breathe into the rainbow shape and feel the space between each vertebrae opening.

5. Stay in Balasana anywhere from 30 seconds to a few minutes. To come up, draw the navel into the spine and roll up one vertebra at a time.

**Beginner’s Tip:** We usually don’t breathe consciously and fully into the back of the torso. Balasana provides us with an excellent opportunity to do just that. Imagine that each inhalation is “doming” the back torso toward the ceiling, lengthening and widening the spine. Then
with each exhalation release the torso a little more deeply into the fold.

Beginners can also use Balasana to get a taste of a deep forward bend, where the torso rests on the thighs.

**Variations:** To increase the length of the torso, stretch your arms forward. Lift your buttocks just slightly away from your heels. Reach the arms longer while you draw the shoulder blades down the back. Then without moving the hands, sit the buttocks down on the heels again.

**Modifications & Props:** If you have difficulty sitting on your heels in this pose, place a thickly folded blanket between your back thighs and calves.

**Partner & Assists:** A helper can help you lengthen the "dome" shape of your back in this pose. Have your partner stand to one of your sides. He/she should place one hand on your sacrum (fingers pointing toward the tailbone) and the other hand on your mid-back (fingers pointing toward your head). As you exhale, your partner can press gently down (toward the floor) with her hands and, without physically moving the hands, lengthen them in opposite directions. Help your partner regulate the pressure on your back—ask for more or less—but have him/her apply more pressure only on an exhalation.

2. Helper places hands in same positions as above, but does not apply any pressure. Just the sense of the hands on the back will help to produce a calming effect to the nervous system.

3. Helper takes the heel of each hand along the triangular shape to your sacrum. On your exhalation, the helper gently presses down and back (toward your heels). Communicate as to how much pressure you desire.

**Preparatory Pose:** Virasana (Hero’s Pose)

**Follow-Up Poses:** Balasana is a resting pose that can precede or follow any asana.

**NOTES:**
Savasana  
(Corpse Pose/ Final Relaxation)

(shah-VAHS-anna)

This pose is also called Mrta (pronounced mrit-TAHS-anna, mrta = death)

Type of Pose: Restorative

Benefits:
- Calms the brain and relieve stress
- Relaxes the body
- Reduces headache, fatigue, and insomnia, mild depression
- Helps to lower blood pressure

Contraindications/Cautions:
- Back injury or discomfort: Do the pose with the knees bent and the feet on the floor, hip-distance apart; support the bent knees on a bolster and/or put a pillow under head and/or back.
- Pregnancy: Raise the head and chest on a bolster. After the first trimester, lie down on the side, rather than supine (on your back).

Step by Step:
1. In Savasana, it’s essential that the body be placed in a neutral position. Sit on the floor with your knees bent, feet on the floor, and lean back onto your forearms. Lift your pelvis slightly off the floor and, with your hands, push the back of the pelvis toward the tailbone, then return the pelvis to the floor. Inhale and slowly extend the right leg, then the left, pushing through the heels. Release both legs, softening the groins, and see that the legs are angled evenly relative to the mid-line of the torso, and that the feet turn out equally. Narrow the front pelvis and soften (but don't flatten) the lower back.

2. With your hands lift the base of the skull away from the back of the neck and release the back of the neck down toward the tailbone. If you have any difficulty doing this, support the back of the head and neck on a folded blanket. Broaden the base of the skull too, and lift the crease of the neck diagonally into the center of the head. Make sure your ears are equidistant from your shoulders.

3. Reach your arms toward the ceiling, perpendicular to the floor. Rock slightly from side to side and broaden the back ribs and the shoulder blades away from the spine. Then release the arms to the floor, angled evenly relative to the mid-line of torso. Turn the arms outward and stretch them away from the space between the shoulder blades. Rest the backs of the hands on the floor as close as you comfortably can to the index finger knuckles. Make sure the shoulder blades are resting evenly on the floor. Imagine the lower tips of the shoulder blades are lifting diagonally into your back toward the top of the sternum. From here, spread the collarbones.
4. In addition to quieting the physical body in Savasana, it’s also necessary to pacify the sense organs. Soften the root of the tongue, the wings of the nose, the channels of the inner ears, and the skin of the forehead, especially around the bridge of the nose between the eyebrows. Let the eyes sink to the back of the head, then turn them downward to gaze at the heart. Release your brain to the back of the head.

5. Stay in this pose for 5 minutes for every 30 minutes of practice. To exit, first roll gently with an exhalation onto one side, preferably the right. Take 2 or 3 breaths. With another exhalation press your hands against the floor and lift your torso, dragging your head slowly after. The head should always come up last.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
Often it’s difficult to release the heads of the thigh bones and soften the groins in this pose. This creates tension throughout the body and restricts the breath. Take two 10-pound sand bags and lay one across each top thigh, parallel to the crease of the groin. Then imagine that the heads of the thigh bones are sinking away from the weight, down into the floor.

**Modifications and Props:**
Usually Savasana is performed with the legs turned out. Sometimes though, after a practice session involving lots of outward rotation of the legs (as for standing poses), it feels good to do this pose with the legs turned in. Take a strap and make a small loop. Sit on the floor with your knees slightly bent and slip the loop over your big toes. Lie back and turn your thighs inward, sliding your heels apart. The loop will help maintain the inward turn of the legs.

**Partnering:**
In Savasana, it’s especially useful to have a partner check your physical alignment. One of the most difficult parts of the body to align on your own is your head. Have your partner sit at your head and observe its position relative to your shoulders. It’s common for students’ heads to be tilted or turned to one side or the other. The partner should gently cradle your head in his/her hands and draw the base of the skull away from the back of the neck, lengthening the shorter side of the neck, so that both ears are equidistant from the shoulders. Then your partner can lay your head back down on the floor, making sure that the tip of your nose is pointing directly toward the ceiling.

**Deepen The Pose:**
To help release the brain and quiet the mind in Savasana, take a block and a 10-pound sand bag. After reclining on the floor, position the block on the floor above your head. The block should sit on one of its sides (the height of the block should be about 5 inches), with one of its ends lightly touching your crown. Then lay the sand bag half on the block and half on your forehead. Scrub the forehead skin down, toward your eyebrows. Then let the brain sink away from this weight.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Savasana should conclude both your asana and your pranayama practices.

**NOTES:**
Supta Baddha Konasana  
(Reclining Bound Angle Pose)

(SOU-p-tah BAH-dah cone-NAHS-anna)

supta = lying down, reclining  
baddha = bound
kona = angle

Type of Pose: Restorative

Benefits:
• Helps to quiet the mind, calm the nerves in times of stress
• Helps to relieve menstrual cramps, spasms and heaviness in the uterus
• Takes pressure of the pelvic area
• Opens the chest
• Regulates blood pressure
• Calms the sympathetic nervous system
• Creates a comforting, cooling effect for hot flashes

Contraindications and Cautions:
• Knee injury

Step by Step:
1. Perform Baddha Konasana. Exhale and lower your back torso toward the floor, first leaning on your hands. Once you are leaning back on your forearms, use your hands to spread the back of your pelvis and release your lower back and upper buttocks through your tailbone. Bring your torso all the way to the floor, supporting your head and neck on a blanket roll or bolster if needed.

2. With your hands grip your topmost thighs and rotate your inner thighs externally, pressing your outer thighs away from the sides of your torso. Next slide your hands along your outer thighs from the hips toward the knees and widen your outer knees away from your hips. Then slide your hands down along your inner thighs, from the knees to the groins. Imagine that your inner groins are sinking into your pelvis. Push your hip points together, so that while the back pelvis widens, the front pelvis narrows. Lay your arms on the floor, angled at about 45 degrees from the sides of your torso, palms up.

3. The natural tendency in this pose is to push the knees toward the floor in the belief that this will increase the stretch of the inner thighs and groins. But especially if your groins are tight, pushing the knees down will have just the opposite of the intended effect: The groins will harden, as will your belly and lower back. Instead, imagine that your knees are floating up toward the ceiling and continue settling your groins deep into your pelvis. As your groins drop toward the floor, so will your knees.

4. To start, stay in this pose for one minute. Gradually extend your stay anywhere from five to 10 minutes. To
come out, use your hands to press your thighs together, then roll over onto one side and push yourself away from the floor, head trailing the torso.
Supta Padangusthasana
(Reclining Big Toe Pose)

(soup-TAH pod-ang-goosh-TAHS-anna)
supta = lying down, reclining
pada = foot
angusta = big toe

Benefits:
- Stretches hips, thighs, hamstrings, groins, and calves
- Strengthens the knees
- Stimulates the prostate gland
- Improves digestion
- Relieves backache, sciatica, and menstrual discomfort
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, flat feet, and infertility

Contraindications and Cautions:
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- High blood pressure: Raise your head and neck on a folded blanket.

Step by Step:
1. Lie supine on the floor, legs strongly extended. If your head doesn’t rest comfortably on the floor, support it on a folded blanket. Exhale, bend the left knee, and draw the thigh into your torso. Hug the thigh to your belly. Press the front of the right thigh heavily to the floor, and push actively through the right heel.

2. Loop a strap around the arch of the left foot and hold the strap in both hands. Inhale and straighten the knee, pressing the left heel up toward the ceiling. Walk your hands up the strap until the elbows are fully extended. Broaden the shoulder blades across your back. Keeping the hands as high on the strap as possible, press the shoulder blades lightly into the floor. Widen the collarbones away from the sternum.

3. Extend up first through the back of the left heel, and once the back of the leg between the heel and sitting bone is fully lengthened, lift through the ball of the big toe. Begin with the raised leg perpendicular to the floor. Release the head of the thigh bone more deeply into the pelvis and, as you do, draw the foot a little closer to your head, increasing the stretch on the back of the leg.

4. You can stay here in this stretch, or turn the leg outward from the hip joint, so the knee and toes look to the left. Pinning the top of the right thigh to the floor, exhale and swing the left leg out to the left and hold it a few inches off the floor. Continue rotating the leg. As you feel the outer thigh move away from the left side of the torso, try to bring the left foot in line with the left shoulder joint. Inhale to bring the leg back to vertical. Lighten your grip on the strap as you do, so that you challenge the muscles of the inner thigh and hip to do the work.

5. Hold the vertical position of the leg anywhere from 1 to 3 minutes, and the side position for an equal length of time.
Once you have returned to vertical release the strap, hold the leg in place for 30 seconds or so, then slowly release as you exhale. Repeat on the right for the same length of time.

**Beginner's Tip:**
If you are especially stiff, do this pose with the bottom-leg heel pressed against a wall. It’s also useful to position a block just outside the raised-leg hip. Then when you swing the leg to the side, rest it on the block. The support under the thigh will help you soften the inner groin.

**Variations:**
In addition to swinging the raised leg to the side, you can also cross it in front of your torso. If the left leg is raised, hold the strap in the right hand, and on an exhalation cross the raised leg to the right side. Inhale to bring the leg back to perpendicular and repeat on the other side.

**Modifications and Props:**
You can make this pose slightly easier by raising the lower-leg heel off the floor a few inches on a block or thick book.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you learn how to ground the leg that stays on the floor. Lay a folded blanket on your top thigh and have your partner sit lightly on it. As you extend the leg vertically, release the thigh away from your partner’s weight. Do the same as you swing the leg to the side and then return it to vertical.

**Deepen The Pose:**
If you have the flexibility, you can grip the big toe of the raised leg instead of using a strap. From the starting position, exhale and bend the raised leg thigh into your torso. Use the index and middle fingers and the thumb to grip the big toe. Be sure to reach the arm inside the thigh when you take the toe. Then perform the pose as described above.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Baddha Konasana
- Uttanasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Standing poses
- Seated forward bends

**NOTES:**
Supta Virasana
(Reclining Hero Pose)

**Caution**: Supta Virasana, the reclining variation of Virasana, is an intermediate pose. DO NOT perform this pose unless you can sit your buttocks relatively easily on the floor between your feet.

(soup-tah veer-AHS-anna)
*supta* = lying down, reclining
*vira* = man, hero, chief

**Benefits:**
- Stretches the abdomen, thighs and deep hip flexors (psoas), knees, and ankles
- Strengthens the arches
- Relieves tired legs
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieves the symptoms of menstrual pain

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
If you have any serious back, knee, or ankle problems, avoid this pose unless you have the assistance of an experienced instructor.

**Step by Step:**
1. Perform Virasana. Exhale and lower your back torso toward the floor. First lean onto your hands, then your forearms and elbows. Once you are on your elbows, place your hands on the back of the pelvis and release your lower back and upper buttocks by spreading the flesh down toward the tailbone. Then finish reclining, either onto the floor or a support.

2. If your front ribs jut up sharply toward the ceiling, it’s a sign of tight groins, which pulls your front pelvis toward your knees and causes your belly and lower back to tense. Use your hands to press your front ribs down slightly and lift your pubis toward your navel. This should lengthen your lower back and lower it toward the floor. If it doesn’t, raise yourself onto a higher support. Then lay your arms and hands on the floor, angled about 45 degrees from the sides of your torso, palms up.

3. Sink the heads of the thighbones deep into the back of the hip sockets. It’s alright to lift your knees a little away from the floor to help soften your groins; in fact, you can raise your knees a few inches on a thickly folded blanket. You can also allow a little bit of space between your knees as long as your thighs remain parallel to each other. Do not, however, allow the knees to splay apart wider than your hips – this will cause strain on the hips and lower back.

4. To begin, stay in this pose for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Gradually extend your stay to 5 minutes. To come out, press your forearms against the floor and
come onto your hands. Then use your hands to lift your torso into Virasana. As you come up, lead with your sternum, not your head or chin. Come out of Virasana in the recommended manner.

**Beginner’s Tip:**
If your thighs insist on sliding apart in this pose, you might try one of two short-term solutions: bind your thighs together with a strap positioned around the mid-thighs; or squeeze a 2- to 3-inch thick book between your thighs. In either case be sure to draw your inner groins sharply up into your pelvis.

**Variations:**
Before doing Supta Virasana you can start with its halfway variation, Supta Ardha Virasana (*are-dah = half*). To sit in Ardha Virasana, draw just your right leg back into Virasana. You can keep your left knee bent with the foot on the floor, or straighten your left leg by pushing out through the heel. Then recline as described above, either onto a support or the floor, following all the cautions. Come out as recommended for Virasana, then repeat with the left leg back.

**Modifications and Props:**
If you’re not able to recline fully on the floor, set a bolster or one or more folded blankets behind yourself to fully support your spine and head. Use as much height as you need to make the position reasonably comfortable. To help release the groins, lay some weight across the creases of the top thighs where they join the front pelvis. Start with a 10-pound sandbag and gradually over time increase the weight to 30 pounds or so.

**Partnering:**
A partner can help you get a feel for the proper movement of the top thighs in this pose. Have her stand at your knees, bend forward, and place her hands on your top thighs, which can be padded with a folded sticky mat. She should then press lightly down on your thighs and turn them inward, rolling the inner thighs toward the floor. Tell your partner if you want more or less pressure on your thighs.

**Deepen The Pose:**
You can also involve the arms in this pose. Inhale and raise your arms toward the ceiling, parallel to each other and perpendicular to the floor. Rock back and forth a few times, further broadening the shoulder blades across your back, then stretch your arms overhead, on the floor, palms up toward the ceiling. Rotate your arms outward, so the outer armpits roll toward the ceiling, and pull your shoulder blades down the back toward your tailbone.

**Preparatory Poses:**
- Baddha Konasana
- Bhujangasana
- Gomukhasana (leg position)
- Virasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
Like its upright cousin, Supta Virasana is an excellent preparatory pose for many asanas, including Padmasana, Baddha Konasana, Bakasana, most standing poses, and any inversion and backbend.

**NOTES:**
Viparita Karani
(Legs-Up-The-Wall Pose)

(vip-par-ee-tah car-AHN-ee)

*viparita* = turned around, reversed, inverted
*karani* = doing, making, action

**Benefits:**
- Relieves tired or cramped legs and feet
- Gently stretches the back legs, front torso, and the back of the neck
- Relieves mild backache
- Calms the mind

**Contraindications and Cautions:**
Many teachers maintain that Viparita Karani is an inversion, and as such should be avoided during menstruation. Others though recommend the pose even during menstruation. Check with your teacher before performing this pose during menstruation. As with any inversion Viparita Karani should be avoided if you have serious eye problems, such as glaucoma. With serious neck or back problems only perform this pose with the supervision of an experienced teacher. If your feet begin to tingle during this pose, bend your knees, touch your soles together, and slide the outer edges of your feet down the wall, bringing your heels close to your pelvis.

**Step by Step:**
The pose described here is a passive, supported variation of the Shoulderstand-like Viparita Karani. For your support you’ll need one or two thickly folded blankets or a firm round bolster. You’ll also need to rest your legs vertically (or nearly so) on a wall or other upright support.

1. Before performing the pose, determine two things about your support: its height and its distance from the wall. If you’re stiffer, the support should be lower and placed farther from the wall; if you’re more flexible, use a higher support that is closer to the wall. Your distance from the wall also depends on your height: if you’re shorter move closer to the wall, if taller move farther from the wall. Experiment with the position of your support until you find the placement that works for you.

2. Start with your support about 5 to 6 inches away from the wall. Sit sideways on right end of the support, with your right side against the wall (left-handers can substitute "left" for "right" in these instructions). Exhale and, with one smooth movement, swing your legs up onto the wall and your shoulders and head lightly down onto the floor. The first few times you do this, you may ignominiously slide off the support and plop down with your buttocks on the floor. Don’t get discouraged. Try lowering the support
and/or moving it slightly further off the wall until you gain some facility with this movement, then move back closer to the wall.

3. Your sitting bones don’t need to be right against the wall, but they should be “dripping” down into the space between the support and the wall. Check that the front of your torso gently arches from the pubis to the top of the shoulders. If the front of your torso seems flat, then you’ve probably slipped a bit off the support. Bend your knees, press your feet into the wall and lift your pelvis off the support a few inches, tuck the support a little higher up under your pelvis, then lower your pelvis onto the support again.

4. Lift and release the base of your skull away from the back of your neck and soften your throat. Don’t push your chin against your sternum; instead let your sternum lift toward the chin. Take a small roll (made from a towel for example) under your neck if the cervical spine feels flat. Open your shoulder blades away from the spine and release your hands and arms out to your sides, palms up.

5. Keep your legs relatively firm, just enough to hold them vertically in place. Release the heads of the thigh bones and the weight of your belly deeply into your torso, toward the back of the pelvis. Soften your eyes and turn them down to look into your heart.

6. Stay in this pose anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes. Be sure not to twist off the support when coming out. Instead, slide off the support onto the floor before turning to the side. You can also bend your knees and push your feet against the wall to lift your pelvis off the support. Then slide the support to one side, lower your pelvis to the floor, and turn to the side. Stay on your side for a few breaths, and come up to sitting with an exhalation.

Beginner’s Tip:
Use your breath to ground the heads of the thighs bones into the wall, which helps release your groins, belly, and spine. In the pose imagine that each inhalation is descending through your torso and pressing the heads of your thigh bones closer to the wall. Then with each exhale, pin your thighs to the wall and let your torso spill over the bolster away from the wall and onto the floor.

Variations:
If you have enough wall space, you can slide your legs apart into a wide "V" to stretch your inner thighs and groins. You also can bend your knees, touch the soles of your feet together, and slide the outer edges of your feet down the wall, bringing your heels toward the pelvis. Then you can push your hands against the top inner thighs to stretch the groins. Remember, however, never push on your knees to open the groins.

Modifications and Props:
In addition to a bolster or blanket for support, two props are very popular for Viparita Karani—a strap and a sand bag. Once in the pose you can snug the strap around your thighs, just above the knees. The strap will help hold your legs in place,
allowing you to further relax the legs and soften the groins.

The sand bag is a little harder to get in place. Once in the pose, bend your knees and slide your feet down the wall, but keep your ankles flexed, soles parallel to the ceiling. As best you can, lay the bag across your soles (or heels) and then re-straighten the knees, pushing the bag actively toward the ceiling. This weight on the legs helps release tension in the lower back.

A bolster under the sacrum and eye pillow are nice additions to the restorative effects.

**Partnering:**
A partner can also help you ground the heads of the thigh bones into the wall. Have her stand at your head as you perform the pose. She should then lean forward and spread her hands around your front thighs, just where they join the pelvis. On your inhale she should push the thighs closer to the wall, and as you exhale, she should hold them firmly to the wall as you release the front torso away from the thighs. Repeat for several breaths.

**Preparatory Poses:**
Viparita Karani is usually considered to be a restorative pose, sequenced near the end of either a restorative or active practice. But Viparita Karani can also be practiced as a pose in itself. Excellent preparations include:
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana
- Supta Baddha Konasana
- Uttanasana
- Virasana

**Follow-Up Poses:**
- Viparita Karani is usually sequenced near the end of a practice just prior to Savasana or sitting pranayama.

**NOTES:**